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G John of One-Town in Vijayawada says that during the good old days, they used to prepare homemade foods on the occasion of Christmas. They start preparation at least a week prior to the festival, but now things have changed as everyone is preoccupied with their daily routine and opt to buy everything from outside. He said that at this age they cannot flex their muscles to prepare the items for the festival and order online as his children have come to celebrate the festival.

With COVID-19 continuing to circulate at high levels globally, countries must strengthen surveillance, sequencing, and reporting to effectively manage respiratory diseases and to protect people's health, the regional director said.

Monday Mirchi

RUNNING WITH THE HARE AND HUNTING WITH THE HOUNDS

Few bureaucrats excel when it comes to running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. It seems Jayesh Ranjan, default go-to person in the erstwhile BRS regime, belongs to this ilk. His instant camaraderie at an out-and-out Congress show has raised the hackles of the mouthpieces of BRS party. They have called out Jayesh for his presence at a meeting that Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had with gig workers on Saturday. BRS' culture vultures were riled because the meeting was not an official one, but 'a tamasha' organised by AICC professionals. Eyebrows are being raised on how the flamboyant babu is managing to work around with the new government when his envious peers were expecting him to be shunted out for his proven proximity to ex-minister KT Rama Rao.

BRS TO HIGHLIGHT THE OTHER SIDE OF BABUS IN LIMELIGHT

Now that the Bharat Rashttra Samithi is in the Opposition group, they seem to have decided to speak openly about those who had been given certain posting and those who had not been given positions for various reasons. A little bird told us that, while all those who had resigned from their positions claim to be honest and blame former CM K Chandrasekhar Rao, the party will go on no-holds-barred attack even against bureaucrats. Interestingly, we have heard bureaucrat Akunuri Murali's diatribe against the BRS. But BRS brass feels that they have not yet shed light on the 'other side of Murali.' They allude to his comments on eating beef, pork with potential to disturb communal harmony in the state that has been free of communal incidents for most part of the last decade. Looks like BRS will leave no stone unturned to fix turncoats and fence-sitters.

SPOTLIGHT ON A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD LETTER TO DENOUNCE PPA

A letter written by senior bureaucrat Arvind Kumar in December 2016 came up during discussion in the Assembly in December 2023. For newbies, Arvind had written a letter to the KCR government questioning the power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Chhattisgarh government. He had pointed out then that Telangana State would lose Rs 10,000 cr on account of the PPA, considering that the agreed power charges per unit had been determined at a higher rate. It was in January 2017 that he was shunted out as Resident Commissioner of Telangana Bhavan. Yours truly saw that, in a bid to tame the Opposition charge, newspaper clippings of Arvind's letter were seen near the CM's lobby in the Assembly. Even as IAS officers were blamed, these 'powerful' clippings caught the attention of a few on how bureaucracy has changed over the years.

TURNING EYES AND EARS TOWARDS THE SPECIALLY ABLED

One common grouse against the police in most places is that they turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the problems of able-bodied

common people unless they know that the complainant knows somebody in their hierarchy or has solid political backing. Proving such people wrong in a way, in Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner Ravi Shankar has come up with a technical solution that is designed to reach out to the specially abled. His initiative 'Disha-Divyang Suraksha', a helpline for the visually impaired (+917337324466) and the hearing impaired (+917337434422) launched early this month, enables the beneficiaries to share their concerns by recourse to sign language. Three sign-language professionals will be available to decode their message, upon receipt of which the police personnel of the PS concerned are expected to act. The initiative is being hailed as a marvel in inclusive policing.

COUPLING INSPECTION WITH INSTRUCTION

Eluru District Collector Prasanna Venkatesh is a hands-on man when it comes to inspection of educational institutions. The other day when the Collector went for 'inspection' of Veeramachaneni Vimaladevi Municipal Elementary School in Ganugulapet, he did not scare the staff there out of their wits. He spent about an hour in the school observing the teaching methods unobtrusively. He then interacted with the students to know the depths of their understanding of various subjects. After obtaining details relating to students' attendance, he advised the staff to provide quality education. He went round even the toilets as part of his instructive inspection.

SCOUTING FOR TALENT STATEWIDE

Gully cricket has yielded many legends. Little known faces from remote rural areas have burst on the national scene aided by the right kind of mentoring and appropriate facilities. As part of Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh's 'Aadudam Andhra' initiative, HM Dhyana Chandra, IAS, has been placed in full charge of the post of VC & MD of SAAP. He now has the unenviable task of scouting for talent statewide i.e. from over 15,000 villages and ward secretariats, 680 mandals, and 175 Assembly constituencies. Call it finding needle in a haystack of whatever, the finals will be conducted at Visakhapatnam.

HAIL END-TO-END ENCRYPTION TECH

End-to-end encryption technology in phone calls made over WhatsApp and VoIP channels has come in handy for bureaucrats in Telangana, who are these days paranoid about their phones being tapped to let snoopers know their leanings in the wake of the regime change. Until the change of guard, top bureaucrats used to freely use their cell phones for making normal calls to speak with their colleagues and others. Things have come to such a pass that some of the former ministers in the BRS government use only WhatsApp to speak with others and their former colleagues. A former senior minister in fact has stopped taking normal calls. "Only WhatsApp calls" is his mantra, though not yet a ringtone.

-- Yours truly

Semi-Christmas celebrations held at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer participated in the Semi-Christmas celebrations held at Durbar Hall in Raj Bhavan on Sunday.

He said that Jesus Christ gave mankind the message of peace, harmony, and universal brotherhood and this is what all of us need to practise in our lives. The Governor said that to be truly happy, we must rise above bigotry and jealousy of others and we must love even those who hate us. Love is the only path to peace, freedom, and happiness.

Earlier, the programme commenced with Bishop Sampath reciting prayers and reading Bible, followed by a Christmas message by Bishop Ebenezer, Metropolitan Mission, Vijayawada. Dr Daniel, vice-chairman of the AP Minorities Commission, felicitated Governor Abdul Nazeer.

After cake-cutting, closing prayers and Benediction were delivered by Bishop George Cornelius, CSI Vijayawada. Officers and staff members of Raj Bhavan attended the programme.

Chandrababu an outdated politician: Kodali Nani

We have used Prashant Kishor to the fullest and there is nothing left in him

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MLA Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao (Nani) has alleged that West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee sent Prashant Kishor to Chandrababu to convince him to join the INDIA alliance. While Pawan Kalyan is in talks with BJP, another PK is in talks with INDIA alliance, Mamata Banerjee and the Congress. Chandrababu continues to follow his two eyes theory," said Nani. He said they had been saying that Chandrababu Naidu was an outdated politician.

"Nothing will happen if the TDP chief meets Prashant Kishor," Nani said. No matter how many PKs are there in TDP, they cannot beat YSRCP led by CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, he said and added: "We have used Prashant Kishor to the fullest and there is nothing left in him."

Kodali recalled that when Prashant Kishor came from



"Nothing will happen if the TDP chief meets Prashant Kishor," Nani said. No matter how many PKs are there in TDP, they cannot beat YSRCP led by CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, he said and added: "We have used Prashant Kishor to the fullest and there is nothing left in him."

Bihar and was the YSRCP strategist, Chandrababu had said that PK can do nothing. On Saturday, Chandrababu met PK. Now, the 'yellow media' should tell what PK will do for them.

He added that the yellow media raised a hue and cry that Chandrababu would be killed on PK's instructions. Now,

Lokesh has roped in PK to kill Chandrababu.

Kodali Nani said that Prashant Kishor had nothing to do with IPAC as he was no longer on the IPAC team.

Earlier in the day, MLA Nani held a meeting with YSRCP social media conveners and co-conveners of the constituency at his residence in Gudivada. Nani

handed over the ID cards to the party conveners and co-conveners. Later, he unveiled the content of Jagananna Connects, which is the official social media page of the YSRCP.

Nani has set the action plan for the social media team as the elections are approaching and suggested that the team should participate in bringing the welfare programmes of the government closer to the people. He said that the social media team should effectively condemn the malicious propaganda against CM Jagan's welfare programmes.

YSRCP Krishna District Social Media Co-Convenor Thota Rajesh, Gudivada Constituency Convenor Karre Chinni, Co-Convenor Ravi, Urban YCP President Gorla Seenu, Market Yard Chairman Matta Nagamani John Victor, and senior YCP leaders were present.

Demand to cancel contract of Vizag Steel with Jindal

Management of blast furnace-3 should be entrusted to SAIL

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao has demanded immediate cancellation of the contract with Jindal Steel to run blast furnace-3 in Visakh Steel Plant. The management of the third furnace should be entrusted to SAIL, he added.

He lamented that the Central government closed down the state-of-the-art Blast furnace- 3 at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant 23 months ago. Further, on the pretext of lack of funds to buy raw materials, production has been reduced and the Visakh Steel Plant is suffering losses. Now, Jindal has been entrusted to run the third furnace and the Central government led by BJP is acting strategically to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant.



He cautioned that the people of the State would not accept the sale or closure of Visakh Steel and that the State committee of the CPM was expressing its solidarity with the agitation of the steel workers.

Srinivasa Rao recalled that earlier, the BJP government tried to sell Vizag Steel to Posco company, but failed due to protests of workers and

political parties. Now, it is planning to sell Vizag Steel in parts and units under which Visakh Steel Plant signed an agreement with Jindal Company handing over furnace-3. He pointed out that the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) was a Central government sector steel industry and incorporated with Bhilai, Bokaro and Durgapur

industries. He claimed that the tie-up of Vizag Steel with SAIL would give the company increased market access to sell steel in South India. He further claimed that the raw material needed to run the Visakh Steel Plant can be obtained from SAIL, so both Visakh Steel Plant and SAIL will benefit from the deal.

Srinivasa Rao expressed fear that by incorporating a private company with Vizag Steel, existing jobs may be eliminated and there will be no reservation. He further feared that this is a wrong move where private companies completely destroy the public sector for their own profit. He added that the CPM State committee is demanding immediate cancellation of the contract with Jindal company.

Speculation rife on PK meeting Naidu

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

Political strategist turned activist Prashant Kishore, popularly known as PK, meeting TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, has become sensational in the political circles. Whether PK will work for the victory of TDP in the coming Assembly elections is not yet clear. But there are several unanswered questions in this episode. PK met Chandrababu Naidu as a political strategist or an opposition leader? PK launched Jana Suraj party in Bihar and advocating for the opposition unity. The founder of Indian Political Action Committee, working with ruling party in Andhra Pradesh YSR Congress party. When PK met opposition leader in AP Chandrababu there was



speculation that he will work for the TDP in the coming Assembly elections. At the same time the IPAC in a tweet clarified by saying "IPAC has been working in collaboration with YSRC party since last year. Together, we're dedicated to working tirelessly until YS Jagan secures a thumping majority victory again in 2024

and continues his unwavering efforts to better the lives of the people of Andhra Pradesh. So, it is very clear that the IPAC founded by PK is working for the ruling YSR Congress. Now the question is how one political agency will work for both the ruling and the main opposition in the coming Assembly elections.

Now in Andhra Pradesh, in the wake of forthcoming Assembly elections, PK met TDP supremo who called him as 'Bihar Decolt'. If PK is associating with IPAC it is not possible to work for TDP as it is working for YSR Congress. If PK has no connection with IPAC, if he works for TDP the fate of BRS which worked for it for some time is seen in the recent Assembly elections. The other question is PK met Chandrababu to know the strategy of TDP or Chandrababu tried to know the strategy of YSR Congress? It is important to note after the meeting Chandrababu, PK told the media that he met Chandrababu because he is the senior most politician in the country. It shows that PK met Chandrababu as a politician and not as a political strategist.

BJP dilemma in...

Continued from Page 1

Though Home Minister Amit Shah had reportedly met Naidu in June and his son Nara Lokesh following his arrest but the BJP has been keen to ensure that it is not seen as taking any side and has maintained that it had taken no decision on an alliance in the state. Naidu is now out on bail. BJP sources said the party's dilemma is that an alliance with the TDP may prove counterproductive if the YSR Congress wins in the elections.

Reddy's ties with the BJP leadership has been warm,

unlike Naidu who has had a patchy record as far as his relations with top BJP leaders are concerned. The TDP had broken its ties with the BJP in 2018 over its demand for 'special status' for Andhra Pradesh where it was in power.

Since losing power in 2019, the TDP has been making efforts to get close to its former ally again.

The two regional parties have also been unstinted in supporting the BJP in Parliament where the backing of YSR Congress' 22 Lok Sabha MPs and nine Rajya Sabha MPs has often helped

the government ride out the opposition's challenge, especially so in the Upper House where it does not have a majority.

With three Lok Sabha MPs and one Rajya Sabha MP, the TDP's presence in Parliament is marginal but it has tried to ensure that it is not seen against the BJP on key issues.

Several BJP leaders believe that it will be prudent for the party to go solo again as the two regional parties are expected to continue supporting their agenda in case of Prime Minister Narendra Modi retaining power for a third term.

'Akshintala Kalasalu' from Ayodhya reaches Nunna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Devotees gave a grand welcome to the 'Kalasalu', which comprised 'Akshintala' and came from Ayodhya Ram Janmabhoomi, at Nunna near Vijayawada on Sunday. The Samarasata Seva Foundation (SSF) representatives brought these 'Akshintala Kalasalu' to NTR district.

The organisers performed special rituals and conducted the grand procession from the Samarasata Seva Foundation's Ganganamma Gudi to Sri Venugopala Swamy Temple.

The women devotees performed the 'Kolatan' in front of the 'Shobhayatra'. Also, Sri Yoga Abhyasa Ashram Trustee Amith Dev Swamiji, Samarasata Seva Foundation district convener Chinnam Markandeswara Rao, and



others carried the 'Akshintala Kalasalu' on their heads and went to the all temples in Nunna village and finally reached the Sri Venugopala Swamy Temple.

Thereafter, a Hindu Sammelanam was organised at the Sri Venugopala Swamy

Temple. In the presence of Sri Vasudevanandagiri Swamiji and Amith Dev Swamiji, 'Akshintala' was mixed in silver teeth at the temple.

Vijayawada Rural Mandal Agriculture Advisory Board Chairman Yarkareddy Nagi Reddy, former Nunna Vice-

President Bhimavarapu Sivarami Reddy, RSS Pracharak Ravuri Rama Rao, Auditor Rama Rao, Astrologist Dr Mamillapalli Phani Kumar, Yogacharya Polareddy Nagi Reddy, and others took part in the procession.

CM Jagan, Naidu, Pawan...

Continued from Page 1

Attending the celebrations, party chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu cut a cake and extended Christmas greetings to the Christian community. Former minister Nakka Emmanna Babu, former Christian Corporation Chairman Maddirala Emmanuel, party senior leaders and others were present.

Jana Sena Party founder K Pawan Kalyan wished people a Merry Christmas. He said, "Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ who gave the message of love, compassion and forgiveness to humanity. Merry Christmas to all Christians on this holy festival.

Peace, tolerance and generosity taught by Christ are always practical. Christianity teaches that life has no meaning unless every human being cultivates some altruistic quality. On my part and behalf of the ranks of the Jana Sena, I sincerely wish that all the people of the country are blessed with peace and prosperity on this Christmas day."

Actor and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna also extended Christmas wishes to the people. "Merry Christmas to all on the occasion of the birth of Jesus Christ who gave the world a peaceful way of life of love, compassion and service. Let us walk in the path of compassionate Jesus and be compassionate and loving towards all people. Christmas should be celebrated by all people together. Happiness should be filled in everyone's life."

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‘Adudam Andhra’ kicks off with massive rally in Srikakulam

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

To empower the youth, the ‘Adudam Andhra’ programme was launched in Srikakulam district on Sunday morning. Joint Collector M Naveen flagged off a rally from Men’s Degree College grounds to Seven Roads Junction, with Narasannapeta MLA Dharmana Krishna Das in attendance.

Joint Collector M Naveen, addressing the gathering, underscored the programme’s

noble goals initiated by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. “The ‘Adudam Andhra’ programme is not just a sports initiative, it’s a platform to promote good health, physical strength, and instill a sense of sportsmanship among the underprivileged, both in rural and urban areas,” he said. Naveen shared the impressive statistic that over 1,07,000 registrations have already poured in, with expectations of more to follow.

Dharmana Krishna Das,

MLA and State Olympic president, expressed optimism about the programme’s potential to unearth hidden talent in rural areas and contribute significantly to the overall development of sports in the State. He remarked, “Sports play a crucial role in gaining attention and support at the State-level. ‘Adudam Andhra’ is an excellent opportunity to showcase and nurture the talents of our youth.”

The festival, slated to run for an impressive 47 days in the district, aspires to instill a last-

ing spirit of sportsmanship among participants. Krishna Das commended the Chief Minister’s foresight, expressing hope that the programme would not only produce skilled athletes but also elevate their status in society.

Assistant Collector Raghavendra Meena, Municipal Commissioner Challa Obulesu, Kalingakomati Corporation Chairman Andavarapu Suribabu, and DSDO Sridhar outlined the primary objectives of ‘Adudam Andhra’.

SIMHACHALAM CONNECTIVITY WALTAIR DIVISION CONSTRUCTS LONGEST SUBWAY

Addresses long-standing need for an underpass

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Waltair Division has undertaken the construction of a 64 meters Limited Height Subway (LHS) at Simhachalam station. The subway aims to facilitate smoother passage between the Gopalapatnam region, Chandra Nagar region, and the main road of Simhachalam station, addressing the long-standing need for an underpass.

Divisional Railway Manager Saurabh Prasad said: “The Limited Height Subway project is a crucial step in enhancing connectivity and ensuring safer transportation in the Simhachalam region. We are committed to meeting the demands of the community and providing an efficient solution to their connectivity needs.”

During Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw’s visit to Simhachalam on December 9, GM East Coast Railway Manoj Sharma and DRM



Saurabh Prasad emphasized the intricate nature of the construction work, noting that it would lead to the simultaneous closure of two-level crossing gates. Shedding light on the progress, Saurabh Prasad said: “The ongoing construction involves the placement of 32 boxes, creating a 64m long Limited Height Subway, which is set to become the longest in Waltair Division.

We are utilizing heavy-duty cranes, excavators, and other advanced machinery to ensure the successful execution of this significant infrastructure project.”

The division has completed the execution of LHS segments in the first phase under the railway track leading to Steel Plant, Port, Duvvada Up & Dn freight traffic lines at Simhachalam.

This accomplishment has led to the resumption of goods train movement on these lines. Upon completion and operational status, the Limited Height Subway will prompt the closure of existing level crossing gates, offering a vastly improved and safer means of crossing between Chandra Nagar areas and the main road of Simhachalam station.



Plea to protect Krishnadevaraya period inscription

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

An inscription of the mighty Vijayanagara Empire Srikrishnadevaraya is found in a state of utter neglect in front of a ruined temple of an abandoned village Gundala located in forest area, five km from Koppunuru village, Macherla mandal in Palnadu district. Based on the information given by local heritage activists Satish Pavuluri, Sivasankar Manimela and Yuganadh Reddy Durgempudi, Dr Sivanagi Reddy of Pleach India Foundation rushed to the spot on Sunday and examined the ruins of a temple and the inscription.

Dr Sivanagi Reddy says that the inscription partly buried in the ground belongs to Srikrishnadevaraya dated to 1516 CE during the year in which he seized the forts of

Kondaveedu, Bellamkonda, Nagarjunakonda etc. It records that a local Chief Basvanayaka who was authorised to rule Nagarjunakonda Seema donated the revenues of Malle Gundala village (now not in existence) lying towards the south of Nagulavaram for the upkeep of Tiruvengalanatha temple. According to Dr Reddy, the inscription also refers Timmarusu, the Prime Minister of Srikrishnadevaraya as the overlord of the region.

Dr Sivanagi Reddy, who could access the inscription spot after a tedious journey in the hilly terrain followed by a steep valley in the forest, sensitized the villagers on the historical significance of the inscription and the need to shift it to Koppunuru village and erect on a pedestal with historical signage to preserve it for posterity.

‘Praja Palana’ to be effective ■ Govt appoints in-charge ministers to monitor schemes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress government has appointed in-charge ministers for all districts to monitor the implementation of ‘Praja Palana’ programmes.

The Praja Palana programme starts on December 28 and will continue till January 6. It is intended to accept applications from the public for implementing the 6-guarantees.

The government appointed Irrigation Minister Nalamada Uttam Kumar Reddy as the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Karimnagar district.

Health Minister Damodar Rajanarsimha is the in-charge Minister of erstwhile Mahbubnagar.

R&B Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Khammam district.

IT Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Rangareddy dis-



trict. Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Warangal district.

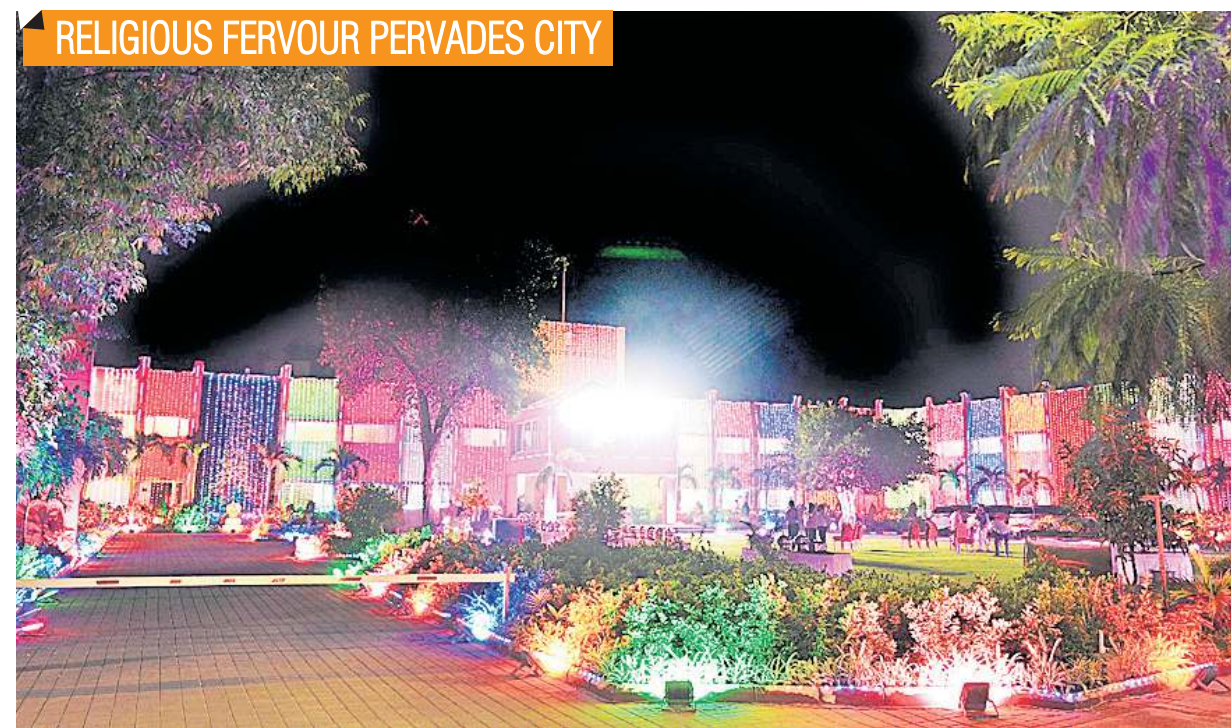
BC Welfare Minister Ponnampallabharathi is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Hyderabad district.

Forest Minister Konda Surekha is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Medak district.

Panchayat Raj Minister Anasuya Seethakka is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Adilabad district.

Agriculture Minister Tummalam Nageswara Rao is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Nalgonda district.

Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao is the in-charge Minister of the erstwhile Nizamabad district.



Andhra Pradesh Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada is illuminated on Sunday to herald the festive spirit of Christmas.

JC FOR ENHANCING ADVOCATES CONSUMER AWARENESS

Highlights role of Consumer Act in curbing fraudulent practices

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Joint Collector Y Naveen emphasized the importance of consumer rights and the need for awareness to ensure prompt justice for consumers during the National Consumer Day programme here on Sunday. The event, jointly organized by Consumer Affairs, Food and Civil Supplies, and the Federation of Consumer Organizations at Bapuji Kalamandir, witnessed discussions on consumer protection in the digital commerce era.

Joint Collector Naveen highlighted the role of the Consumer Act in curbing fraudulent practices, stating, “The Consumer Act aims to protect consumers from unscrupulous businessmen. However, some consumers still suffer due to a lack of understanding about this law. There is a need to create awareness so that everyone understands



their rights.” He added that consumers have the right to question product defects when fully aware, ensuring they can benefit from their purchases. Acknowledging the positive outcome of consumer clubs in schools, Joint Collector Y. Naveen released a pamphlet by master trainer Venkatachalam, who organized these clubs.

District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission Chairman Raghupatruni Chiranjeevi emphasized the rise of digital transactions and

online marketing, urging increased awareness. He encouraged consumers to obtain bills for purchases, ensuring appropriate rights and warranty claims. Speaking on the importance of water in our lifestyle, Chairman Chiranjeevi advised checking minerals in water bottles, emphasizing the need for TDS and pH meters in every household. He added, “Minerals in drinking water bottles should be between 100 and 300, and the pH value should not be less than 7.” He

also reminded consumers to check bills in star hotels, stating that tips are unnecessary if service charges are included.

District Supply Officer D Venkataramana stressed the significance of National Consumer Day on December 24, urging consumers to understand the law for effective resolution of cases. Shankara Visveswara Rao of the Tunikalu Measurements Department provided insights on precautions while buying, including attention to manufacture dates.

MLA Malladi Vishnu extends Christmas wishes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Planning Board Vice-Chairman and Central MLA Malladi Vishnu extended Christmas greetings to all the people of Central constituency. He said that the birthday of Christ, who taught love and service, is the happiest day for Christians. Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, desired the prosperity of universal humanity. He shed his blood to show how great the virtues of patience and forgiveness are and showed the way of peace to the world.

He added that centuries ago, Christ had preached that everyone should have patience and love and show compassion to the helpless. Vishnu wished that all the people of the constituency celebrate this day with joy. With the grace of God, he wished that the State would achieve further development under the leadership of CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.



Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, desired the prosperity of universal humanity. He shed his blood to show how great the virtues of patience and forgiveness are and showed the way of peace to the world.

Chakravarthi takes charge as Traffic DCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

K Chakravarthi, a Non-Cadre Superintendent of Police (SP), took charge as the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic DCP) at the NTR District Police Commissionerate in Vijayawada on Sunday. Previously, he was SP of the Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force at Tirupati.

The State government transferred several Non-Cadre SPs recently, and Chakravarthi has been posted as Traffic DCP at Vijayawada. After taking charge, Chakravarthi called on Police Commissioner



Kranthi Rana Tata. They discussed the traffic congestion in Vijayawada and the rest of NTR district.

Protection of consumer rights is govt’s aim: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Consumers Affairs, Food, and Civil Supplies Karumuri Venkata Nageswara Rao has stated that his government is working with an aim to protect the rights of the consumers. For the wider benefits of consumers and immediate justice, the State government amended the Consumer Protection Act-2019, he said.

The minister participated in the National Consumers Day observance held at the Tummalapalli Kshetraya Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Sunday. During the programme, guests spoke on Consumer Protection in the

e-Commerce and Digital Era. Minister Nageswara Rao said that his government strengthened the Consumer Affairs, Food, and Civil Supplies Department. He praised the services of the Consumer Voluntary Organisation, which has been working as a bridge between traders and consumers.

Consumers should verify the quality of every product after purchasing it and should not believe fraudulent advertisements. Also, they should take a bill for each product and service, he said.

If a consumer is cheated by the traders wherever they buy the products, then they have the opportunity to complain

at the local district commission. The government is keeping vigil on petrol bunks, way-bridges, fertilizer shops, sweet shops, gold shops and gas godowns. The government punished those traders with penalties of Rs.4.52 crore and the same amount was distributed to the consumers, he said.

Consumer Affairs, Food, and Civil Supplies Department Commissioner H Arun Kumar said that due to the lack of awareness on the Consumer Act, several frauds are happening in the State. The government has taken an initiative step to create awareness among the people through Gram/Ward

Sachivalayam, he added.

Director M Vijaya Sunitha said that the department is creating awareness through social media, YouTube, and posters among the people. If there are any faults or defects in the goods or products, consumers may complain to the toll-free number 1967, she added.

Andhra Pradesh Planning Commission Vice-Chairman and Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu, NTR District Consumer Forum President N Chiranjeevi, Kapu Corporation Chairman Adapa Seshagiri Rao, NTR District Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, and others were present.



‘ADUDAM ANDHRA’

Collector flags off 3K run

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh flagged off a 3K run taken out here on Sunday as a prelude to the ‘Aadum Andhra’ sports event to begin from December 26.

The Collector flagged off the 3K run which began at HDFC bank near Vatluuru and reached the indoor stadium via Satrampadu, CR Reddy college road, RTC bus station road and ZP office road. A large number of youths and officials including the Collector, SP and Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni took part in the event.

Addressing the gathering, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh said that the ‘Aadum Andhra’ sports event being organized by the AP government is providing a good platform to the youths to participate in sports and demonstrate their talent.

The ‘Aadum Andhra’ sport event would be held from December 26 across the state. The 3K run was organized here



today in order to sensitize the people on the ‘Aadum Andhra’ sport event. The ‘Aadum Andhra’ would help to explore the talent among the youths and give an opportunity to them to take part in sports.

“The ‘Aadum Andhra’ sport event will be organized in five phases for which 1,47,000 players have registered their names to participate in various events. As many as 320 play grounds have been prepared to

organize the sport event in 625 village/ward secretariat limits in Eluru district,” the Collector informed.

Prasanna Venkatesh said that 14,354 teams have been formed to organize various sports events including cricket, volleyball, kabaddi and badminton, adding that 7,198 matches would be organized.

The Collector regretted that the youth nowadays have got used to spending most of the time on mobile phones, TVs

and other electronic gadgets and not participating in sports. Those who are above 15 years of age could participate in any event being organized in the ‘Aadum Andhra’ sport event.

SP D Mary Prashanthi called upon players to participate in the event and make Aadum Andhra a grand success in the district. Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni said that the ‘Aadum Andhra’ would be organized from December 26 to February 10 and competitions in various sports events would be conducted at village, mandal, constituency and district level. The players who performed the highest talent would be provided an opportunity to play at the state level tournament.

DRO M Venkateswarulu M Venkateswarulu, ZP CEO K Subba Rao, RDO SSK Khajavali, municipal Commissioner S Venkata Krishna were among those who took part in the event.

Minister Rajini, Collector inspect arrangements for CM’s programme

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Health Vidadala Rajini, flanked by Collector M Venugopal Reddy and other officials inspected the arrangements being made for the Chief Minister’s programme at Loyola public school at Nallapadu near here on Sunday.

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will inaugurate the Aadum Andhra sports event on December 26 at Nallapadu village near here. The Minister, Collector and a host of leaders and officials visited the area and reviewed the arrangements being made for the event.

Talking to the media on the occasion, Minister Vidadala Rajini said that the state government is very keen to organize the mega sport event ‘Aadum Andhra’ across the state level.

He said that all the arrangements are being made by the authorities expeditiously to organize the Aadum Andhra



programme. The sport event is aimed to explore the sport talent from the village level players and select the talented players from the age of 15 years to 60 years to the state level competitions.

The Minister said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is developing the medical sector for the health of the people of the state. Along with health on the one hand, Aadum Andhra programme is being undertaken to identify talent, she stated adding that from the village level to the state level, the games will be orga-

nized from December 26 to February 10, 2024, with the government bearing the full expenditure.

“As many as 1,25,000 players have already registered their names to participate in the Aadum Andhra Games in the district. All enthusiast players should take advantage of the opportunity to showcase the talent and prove their abilities in sports. In sports competitions, everyone should contribute to identify those who are skilled in sports in the state,” the minister said.

MLC Lella Appireddy said that keeping in view the ensu-

ing elections, Jagan Mohan Reddy headed government is focusing on the implementation of welfare schemes efficiently. “All opposition parties have come together to defeat Jagan Mohan Reddy but they can not do so,” he claimed.

Since the YSRCP is in the hearts of people strongly, the opposition parties are taking the help of political strategists, he ridiculed. The MLC expressed confidence that YSRCP would be voted to power once again.

Collector M Venugopal Reddy said that the Chief Minister would arrive at Loyola Public school on December 26 at 10 am and formally launch the Aadum Andhra sport competition.

MLA Mohammad Mustafa, Mayor Kavati Manohar Naidu and MLC Dokka Manikavara Prasad also spoke. Joint Collector G Rajakumari and Market Yard chairman N Rajanarayana were among those who were present.

Police officials directed to execute NBW expeditiously

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district Superintendent of police Malika Garg directed the police officials to execute the Non-Bailable Warrants expeditiously.

The SP held a meeting with the DSPs, CIs and SIs of Ongole sub-division here on Sunday and reviewed various issues. The SP reviewed various issues including the cases pending for a long time in each police station, accused belonging to which place and issued several orders to the police officers.

Knowing the reasons for pending non-bailable warrants, a special team should be formed to serve them to those



outside the state and execute the pending NBWs expeditiously, so that the investigation of the case is completed successfully and the victims can get justice in time, the SP told the police officials.

Informing that there should be no excess of pending cases, even within the jurisdiction of any police station, every single case should be completed as

soon as possible and justice should be provided to the victims, SP Malika Garg said.

Additional SP (Admin.) K Nageswara Rao, Additional SP (Crime) SV Sridhar Rao, DSP Narayanaswamy Reddy, CIs Bhima Naik, M Lakshman, S Jagadish, Bhakatavatsalam, Srinivasa Reddy and Ranganath were among those who were attended the meeting.

RAIN LIKELY IN SOUTH COASTAL AP, RAYALASEEMA

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Light to moderate rain is likely to occur at isolated places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema on Monday, Meteorological Centre said on Sunday.

In a daily weather report here, it said that dry weather is likely to occur in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next seven days except on Monday. Dry weather prevailed over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours.

Northeast monsoon has been weak over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema. The lowest minimum temperature of 15.5 degree Celsius was recorded at Arogyavaram in Rayalaseema on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, the report added.



1300 house pattas sanctioned in Gurajala constituency: MLA

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

YSRCP Gurajala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy said that 1300 house pattas were sanctioned to the houseless poor in Gurajala constituency and the documents were handed over to them.

He told the media in Gurajala on Sunday that the YSRCP led government aimed at providing a house site to every houseless poor. It is aimed to ensure that there would be no poor family without its own house, he stated. He said that 3300 house pattas were given to the houseless poor in Dachepalli constituency.

The MLA alleged that Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu assured



the farmers of waiving Rs 85,000 crore agriculture loans before he came to power but he waived only Rs 15,000 crore agriculture loans after he voted to power.

The YSRCP government had extended Rs 10.70 crore under the YSR Asara scheme to the farmers in Dachepalli constituency, MLA Mahesh Reddy said, adding that Rs 17 crore has

been given to the beneficiaries under Ammavadi scheme.

The government schools are being modernized at par with the private schools at a cost of Rs 6.30 crore in the district. The MLA further said that a medical college is coming up in Piduguralla providing an opportunity to 500 students to pursue medicine.

Police seized Rs 55 lakh while taking in a bus

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The police seized Rs 55.87 lakh while being taken to Chennai in a bus at Gudur.

DSP Suryanarayana Reddy told the media on Sunday that on a tip off the police conducted checking of vehicles. They found Rs 55.87 lakh



being taken to Chennai by two people in a bus. They failed to produce relevant documents pertaining to the cash.

The two persons told the police that they were taking the money to Chennai to purchase gold. The money would be handed over to the IT officials, the DSP said.

Contract staff continue stir on 5th day

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The outsourcing, contract and part-time employees working in the education department continued their agitation on the 5th day demanding the government to regularize their service.

The outsourcing, contract and part-time employees organized a novel protest here on Sunday by standing on their knees demanding the government to take steps to regularize their service.

Kakinada district JAC president M Chantibabu, speaking on the occasion, said that the contractor, outsourcing and part-time employees in the education department are playing significant roles in implementing the Amma Vodi, Vidya Deevana and



other schemes. The flagship schemes of Jagan Mohan Reddy headed government are being implemented in rural areas efficiently as the contract, outsourcing and part-time employees are working sincerely.

“When the outsourcing, contract and part-time employees appealed to the government to regularize their

service, the government did not respond favourably. They agitating employees demand Rs 26,000 salary, HRC and other legitimate benefits,” JAC president Chantibabu said.

He recalled that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy assured while speaking in the Assembly of fulfilling their demands but has not taken steps to fulfill his assurance.

United Teachers Federation district president Nagesh, Secretaries Chakravarti, Bahujan Teachers Federation leader Bojja Sharat, AP School teachers union leader Chalapati and JAC district vice president PVV Mahalkshmi were among those extended solidarity to the agitating outsourcing, contract and part-time employees.

Doctorate conferred on Arts College lecturer Anusha

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Government Arts College lecturer K Anusha has been conferred on doctorate. Anusha is working as a lecturer at the biotechnology department of the College.

College Principal Dr.Ramachandra RK said here on Sunday that Anusha conducted research on the

Microbial interactions influencing the emergence of pathogenic Vibrio species in fish feed at Krishna University, Machilipatnam and submitted her dissertation.

The doctorate was conferred on her on December 22. Anusha thanked the College principal for his encouragement to conduct research for the doctorate degree.



Woman stabbed to death by husband

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

In a gruesome incident, a woman was brutally murdered by her husband at NTR colony in Gudivada town on Sunday.

Police said that the accused Suryanarayana and the deceased Ramalakshmi got married five years ago. However, she deserted her husband and had been living with her parents for the last four years. The accused Suryanarayana went to her house, picked up an argument and stabbed her indiscriminately, killing instantaneously. The father of the deceased, Venkanna went to the rescue of his daughter but he was also stabbed.

Later the accused Suryanarayana consumed pesticide in a bid to end life. However he was admitted to the area hospital where his condition is said to be stable. The police registered a case and shifted the body for the postmortem.



TS govt transfers seven IAS officers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government transferred seven IAS officers on Sunday.

Dr Jyoti Buddha Prakash, who was the Commissioner of the Prohibition and Excise Department, is now the Commissioner of the Transport Department while E Sridhar who served as the special secretary to the state government in the Tribal Welfare Department is now posted as the Commissioner for Prohibition and Excise department.

Bharati Hollikeri, who was Rangareddy Collector and District Magistrate, has been transferred and posted to the General Administration department.

Gowtham Potru, who was

serving as Medchal-Malkajgiri Collector and District Magistrate, has been posted as the Director of Intermediate Education and Secretary of the Board of Intermediate Education.

EV Narasimha Reddy is the new Director of the Tribal Welfare Department and Devender Singh Chauhan who had served as the Rachakonda Commissioner is now the Commissioner of Civil Supplies and EO as well as the Principal Secretary in charge of the CAF and CS department.

Meanwhile, the Minister of State has been vested with full additional charge in the post of Vice Chairman, Managing Director and Executive Director of TSIIC (Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation).

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress government has changed its mind and has appealed to the people to apply for benefits as per its 6-guarantees from December 28 to January 6. Earlier, the government stated that it will start two more schemes of 6-guarantees from December 28, that is the date of Congress foundation day. The Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said on Saturday that their government will start a couple of schemes on December 28.

The government will provide application forms to the public from December 26 and people will have to apply from December 28 till January 6 using the application forms.

It may be recalled that the

SIX GUARANTEES Apply for benefits



government has been implementing the free bus travel scheme which is part of the Mahalakshmi scheme without any application.

However, women travelling in buses are displaying Aadhaar cards to confirm domicile status.

Speaking to the media on Sunday after meeting with Collectors, CPs and SPs at the Secretariat, Revenue Minister

Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy gave details of the meeting.

He said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy discussed issues regarding land with collectors and SPs. The Minister said that they will launch ‘Praja Palana’ from December 28 and that they will conduct Grama Sabhas from December 28 to January 6 and implement ‘Praja Palana’.

“The government will pro-

vide applications to the people first regarding the 6-guarantees. The government will accept applications from December 28 to January 6 through Grama Sabhas. Eligible people will have to give their filled-in applications to officials. The officials will issue receipts to the people after accepting the applications. Officials will go to the people and accept applications by going to the houses of the public. We directed officials to accept applications even if there are only 10 houses in a hamlet. Officials will decide beneficiaries after accepting all applications,” Ponguleti said.

He said that they are already implementing two schemes of the 6-guarantees and made it clear that they will not cut schemes like the previous government.

‘White ration’ card holders eligible

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that ‘White Ration Card’ holders are also eligible for the 6-guarantees.

Addressing the media after Chief Minister Revanth Reddy’s meeting with collectors, CPs and SPs on Sunday at the Secretariat, Ponguleti said that the government will also extend the 6-guarantees to all the eligible although they may not have white ration cards. Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that ‘White Ration Card’ holders are also eligible for the 6-guarantees.

Addressing the media after Chief Minister Reddy’s meeting with collectors, CPs and SPs on Sunday at the Secretariat, Ponguleti said that the govt will also extend the 6-guarantees to all the eligible although they may not have white ration cards.



‘BRS govt heads registered lands of others in their name using Dharani’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging that the BRS government heads registered the lands of others in their names using the Dharani portal, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that they will come to the media with clear evidence regarding the errors in the Dharani portal.

Ponguleti said that the Dharani portal was not good and that the problems of the

people due to the Dharani portal prove that the portal has drawbacks. He said that the Congress government will launch an operation soon to clean up Dharani.

He said that people threw the BRS and its leaders into the Bay of Bengal for criticising the Congress saying that the Congress would throw Dharani into the Bay of Bengal if it came to power.

He made it clear that the

Congress government will not act vengefully against anyone. However, it will not let go of people who have committed offences whoever it may be.

Speaking to the media after Chief Minister Revanth Reddy’s meeting with Collectors, CPs and SPs on Sunday at the Secretariat, Ponguleti said that the government has an understanding regarding Dharani portal.

The Minister said that the

government had given directions to officials regarding the Dharani portal. The government will do a day-long review of the Dharani portal in future, he said.

“Officials spoke openly at the meeting after several years. There will not be any vengeful acts against officials.

However, the government will not tolerate officials who commit illegal acts. Collectors’ meetings called by the BRS

government were one-sided battling events. However, the government listened to the opinions of Collectors at Sunday’s meeting and officials did give some suggestions. The BRS government never used to consider the suggestions of officials. We took feedback from officials today,” Ponguleti said.

The Minister said that BRS leaders themselves accepted that Telangana has a debt of Rs

6 lakh crore including Rs 81,000 crore debts of the electricity sector.

“What was the need to demolish the old secretariat and construct a palace-like building? Is that development?” the Minister asked.

He asked people not to get disturbed thinking that they may lose their social welfare schemes and added that the Congress government will not scrap any welfare scheme.

INDIA CORNER

Two young siblings die as ceiling collapses

Two siblings aged five and three years died after the ceiling of their house collapsed on them in Greater Noida on Sunday, police said. Four people, including construction workers, also suffered injuries in the incident at Samadhipur village in Dadri police station area, they said. A police spokesperson said repair work was underway at the house of Lal Singh and bricks were being laid on the second floor of the building. "Due to excessive weight on the upper roof, it fell on the middle-level roof (first floor), which eventually fell down on the ground floor where the two randaughters of Lal Singh were playing," the police official said. The two children got trapped under the debris. They were soon brought out and rushed to hospital for treatment but they died during the treatment," the official added. Four people, including construction workers, also suffered injuries and are undergoing treatment at the GIMS Hospital, the police said.



Two doctors suspended over death of 18 patients in Thane hospital

More than four months after 18 patients died in 24 hours at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Hospital in Maharashtra's Thane, the city's civic administration has suspended two doctors for dereliction of duty, an official said on Sunday. Thane is the home turf of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and the large number of patient deaths on August 12 and 13 at the civic-run facility had prompted the opposition to target the government, alleging mismanagement. According to a spokesperson of the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC), an assistant doctor and an associate doctor have been suspended for dereliction of duty in connection with the single-day deaths. Amid political bickering over the deaths, CM Shinde had ordered the constitution of a high-level committee to probe the matter. The committee's report was tabled during the recent winter session of the assembly, said an official.



PMO takes stock of relief, rehabilitation efforts in flood-hit Tamil Nadu

The Prime Minister's Office on Sunday held a high-level meeting to take stock of the post-flood situation in Tamil Nadu and deliberated on various measures to support the state. PMO officials have interacted with Tamil Nadu government functionaries to discuss relief and rehabilitation measures in the state, official sources said. The deployment of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as well and help from armed forces, including helicopters, in case of need was also discussed, they added. A visit of an inter-ministerial central team to assess the damage was also discussed in the meeting. Intense rains and heavy inundation, unseen in the recent times, have hit parts of the southern state. Chief Minister M K Stalin had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss relief initiatives.



Proactive steps taken to control prices of food items: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday noted that the Centre has taken many proactive steps in the last few years to control retail prices of food items and said the government will keep inflation under control while ensuring the country's economic growth.

He was addressing an event, organised by the ministry here, to celebrate National Consumers Day.

"Today, India has become the fastest growing large economy. Going forward, we will keep inflation under check and also ensure economic growth," Goyal said.

Retail inflation inched up to a three-month high of 5.55 percent in November driven by higher food prices, according to latest official data.

The retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was at 4.87 percent in October.



Inflation had been declining since August when it touched 6.83 percent.

On steps taken by the central government, Goyal highlighted that 140 new price monitoring centres have been set up to keep a close watch on wholesale and retail prices of essential commodities.

"Today, prices are being monitored at 550 (consuming) centers daily. This helps in insulating consumers from price rise," Goyal said.

In the last two years, he said, when the entire world witnessed very high inflation,

especially in the food items, India was able to control inflation through proactive fiscal and monetary policies.

"Whenever inflation (in some commodity) started rising, the government took proactive measures and controlled it," Goyal cited measures taken by the Centre to control price rise in tomatoes and onions in a short period of time.

The government sold tomatoes and onions through retail outlets of NCCF, NAFED, and Kendriya Bhandar as well as mobile vans.

In the case of onions, he said the government is buying onions from farmers to create buffer stock and ensure they get a fair price for their produce.

He also highlighted that the Centre is selling Bharat Dal at Rs 60 per kg and Bharat atta at Rs 27.50 per kg to provide relief to the common man.

The government has banned exports of wheat, broken rice, non-basmati white rice and

onions. It has also reduced import duties on edible oils and pulses to boost domestic supply and control price rise.

Talking about consumer protection issues, Goyal appreciated the work done by his ministry and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) to resolve consumers' grievances.

He stressed on the need to clear the backlog of cases pending at consumer courts at the national, state and district levels.

"We are all collectively working for better consumer satisfaction," he said, adding that the country will progress if consumers would be satisfied.

Goyal said his ministry is focusing on the adoption of technology in consumer forums for speedy delivery of justice. To protect consumer interests, Goyal highlighted that the Department of Consumer Affairs has issued a strict guidelines on dark patterns used by online market.



President Murmu greets citizens on eve of Christmas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday greeted citizens on the eve of Christmas and hoped that everyone rekindles the spirit of mercy and compassion.

The festival of Christmas gives the message of love and compassion, she said. "This festival also inspires us for selfless service to the humanity. The teachings of Jesus Christ are always relevant to maintain peace and harmony in the society," Murmu said. On this holy festival, "let everyone rekindle the spirit of mercy and compassion" and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ in their lives, the president said.

'Modi aiming to make 140 crore people self-reliant'

PNS ■ AJHMEDABAD

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to make 140 crore people, including the poor, in the country "atmanirbhar" (self-reliant) and has worked with dedication for it.

PM Modi wants to make India self-reliant in space technology and defence, and also aims to make the poor people self-reliant, Shah said addressing a gathering here of beneficiaries of the PM SVANidhi scheme, which helps street vendors get easy loans.

The Union minister said poor people have benefited the most under the Modi government.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel was also present at the function to give loans to beneficiaries of the Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM-SVANidhi scheme).

Shah said Prime Minister Modi has given a call to make



India "atmanirbhar" and wants to make the country self-reliant in space technology, defence, all kinds of businesses and other fields.

"PM Modi wants to make 140 crore people including all the poor people atmanirbhar. Besides space technology, research and development among other things, the prime minister has worked with complete dedication to improve the standard of life of 60 crore poor people," Shah said.

"In the last nine years, around three crore people got their own homes, four crore people got electricity connections, 10 crore people got gas

cylinders, 12 crore people got toilets, 80 crore people got free ration and 60 crore people have been covered under the Rs 5 lakh health insurance (scheme)," he said.

Various schemes are being implemented to bring the poor people out of poverty, Shah said.

"In my constituency (Gandhinagar in Gujarat), over 1.5 lakh people have availed the benefit of PM-SVANidhi scheme, under which financial assistance is given to those who are running small businesses and hand carts without any collateral," he said.

"In Gandhinagar constituency, there is 90 per cent saturation of various pro-poor schemes," he added.

Chief Minister Patel said as a result of schemes launched by PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the poor people in the country are now living a self-reliant life.

Shah is on a day's visit to his constituency where he is scheduled to attend various

Need to nip in bud anti-national narratives

PNS ■ NOIDA

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar Sunday said there was a need to "generate a climate" to nip in the bud anti-national narratives set afloat by design to malign institutions and high constitutional offices.

Addressing the convocation ceremony of Gautam Buddha University in Greater Noida, he expressed sadness that "one of our parliamentarians went to Harvard and said that India's democracy is in peril and in danger."

The vice-president said India is the only country where power transfer is done by the ballot and there has never been any problem.

Once the vote has been cast on the machine and the result declared by the election commission, then there is universal acceptance of the decision but then "they go to Harvard and say this", Dhankhar said.

"We have to generate a climate that anti-national narratives set afloat by designs, by a strategy to malign institutions, high constitutional offices, they must be nipped in



the bud," the Vice President said.

"Let me tell you boys and girls that India is the only country in the world that has constitutionally structured democracy at the village level, at the panchayat level, at the district level, at the state level and the Central level," Dhankhar said.

The vice-president drew a comparison between India of the past and that of the present to say, "Today's India is not in anyone's grip. India has its own thinking in foreign affairs. Our voice is being heard. Our passport has that respect that we had never imagined. We are in a position to take tough steps." But people must keep in mind the teachings of Gautam Buddha also, he said.

Caste census not done systematically: Yediyurappa

FRESH SURVEY SHOULD BE DONE

PNS ■ DAVANGERE

Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said state's Socio-Economic and Education Survey, popularly known as the "caste census," was not done systematically, and urged the Congress government in Karnataka to get a fresh survey done and present the facts before the people.

Karnataka's two dominant communities -- Vokkaligas and Lingayats -- too have expressed disapproval about the survey, calling it unscientific, and have demanded that it be rejected and a fresh survey to be conducted.

"There is a feeling in everyone's mind that the survey has not been done systematically. I too have a similar opinion. So, a fresh cast census has to be done and facts have to be made known to people. I urge the government to make honest efforts in this regard,"



Yediyurappa said. Yediyurappa, a former Chief Minister hails from the Lingayat community.

The then Siddaramaiah-led Congress government (2013-2018) in 2015 had commissioned the social-economic and educational survey, popularly known as the "caste census", at an estimated cost of Rs 170 crore in the state.

The state Backward Classes Commission under its then chairperson H Kantharaju was tasked with preparing a caste census report.

The survey work was completed in 2018, towards the end of Siddaramaiah's first tenure as Chief Minister, but was not accepted or made public.

With pressure mounting on his government, from a certain section, to make public the state's survey, following Bihar government releasing findings of its caste survey recently, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has said that a decision will be taken once he receives the report.

The Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes under its current Chairman K Jayaprakash Hegde, which has the caste census findings, has been given time till January 31, 2024 to submit the report to the government. Commenting on the hijab controversy, Yediyurappa said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah should stop sowing the seeds of poison between communities.

Desi INS Imphal to be commissioned tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

INS Imphal, the indigenously-built stealth-guided missile destroyer equipped with BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, will be commissioned into the Indian Navy on Tuesday in a boost to its maritime capability amid China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region.

It is the first warship to have been named after a city from the Northeastern region, the approval for which was accorded by the President in April 2019.

The warship will be commissioned at a ceremony in the naval dockyard in Mumbai in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, officials said.

The naming of the ship after the capital city of Manipur underlines the importance of the Northeastern region for national security and prosperity, they said.

A guided missile destroyer with a displacement of 7,400 tonnes and an overall length of



164 meters, Imphal is a potent and versatile platform equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship missiles, and torpedoes.

Powered by Combined Gas and Gas (COGAG) propulsion, the ship is capable of achieving speeds over 30 knots (56 km/hour).

The ship boasts of a high indigenous content of approximately 75 percent that includes BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, medium-range surface-to-air missiles, anti-submarine indigenous

rocket launchers and a 76mm super rapid gun mount.

INS Imphal was delivered to the Indian Navy on October 20 after the completion of a rigorous and comprehensive trial programme both in the harbor and at sea.

Subsequently, the ship successfully test-fired the extended-range supersonic BrahMos missile last month, a first for any indigenous warship before commissioning.

Following this milestone, the ship's crest was unveiled by Defence Minister Singh in New Delhi in the presence of

the chief minister of Manipur. Upon commissioning, INS Imphal will join the Western Naval Command.

rocket launchers, torpedo launchers, and anti-submarine warfare helicopters.

"The ship is equipped to fight under Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions and has a high degree of automation and stealth features further enhancing her combat capability and survivability," the Navy said.

It said the time taken to build INS Imphal and for her trials is the shortest for any indigenous destroyer.

Imphal's keel was laid on May 19, 2017, and the ship was launched into water on April 20, 2019. "INS Imphal sailed out for her maiden sea trials on April 28 and has completed a comprehensive schedule of trials, both in the harbour and at sea, leading up to its delivery on October 20 within a record time frame of six months -- the fastest for a ship of its size," it said in a statement.

"The ship Imphal will have the unique distinction of being the largest and the most advanced destroyer to be ever named after a city from the northeast.



Retired SSP shot dead by terrorists

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

A 72-year-old retired police officer, who was the local "muezzin", was shot dead by terrorists while he was giving "azaan" the call for prayer -- from a mosque in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district on Sunday, police said.

Recalling the moments before Mohammad Shafi Mir was killed, his cousin Mohammad Mustafa, who was at home, said the call for the pre-dawn prayers was being given by a loudspeaker and suddenly it stopped.

Mega Gita recitation aggravates political discord

BJP, TMC resort to war of words

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The recitation of Bhagavad Gita at the Brigade Parade Grounds here on Sunday aggravated the political discord between the BJP and the ruling TMC, with the ruling TMC, with the saffron party urging Hindu unity and the TMC criticising the alleged political exploitation of the mega event.

In a one-of-its-kind gathering at the iconic ground, nearly one lakh people from diverse backgrounds, adorned in traditional attire, collectively chanted sacred verses from the Bhagavad Gita. Participants of various ages and societal statuses recited the verses alongside revered sages.

Prominent figures from the Bengal BJP unit and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) participated in the event. Organisers claimed that

around 120,000 people had registered for the programme.

Despite claims of being apolitical, the event triggered a war of words between the ruling TMC and the opposition BJP in the state.

Reflecting on the event, BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar said, "Bhagavad Gita is the biggest gift of India to the world. Those who are mocking the event don't have any respect towards the Hindu religion and its traditions. Those who are trying to divide the Hindus will fail in their endeavours."

Leader of the Opposition in West Bengal assembly, Suvedu Adhikari, said, "After this event, the Hindus of the state will rise and unite against the divisive forces."

He said the gathering was aimed not only to recite the Bhagavad Gita, but also to unite Hindus.

Bigger mandate

A boost in vote share and seat count in 2024 is on the mind of BJP leaders; it is already setting targets

The BJP plans to roll out its well-oiled, mammoth poll machinery and heavy guns as the nation gears up for the crucial 2024 general elections. The party's recent office bearers meeting, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah took the centre stage, underlined its commitment to strategise and mobilise resources for a formidable electoral campaign. At the two-day meeting, Modi asked workers to work in mission mode and set the party a target of getting 35 crore votes. The BJP's focus on a significant boost in vote share indicates its aspirations to consolidate power and maintain its dominant position in Indian politics. Modi's charismatic leadership has been a key factor in the party's electoral successes. The party is likely to build on the 'Modi wave' by showcasing the Government's achievements and emphasising the leadership's commitment to development and national security. The BJP aims to capitalise on Home Minister Amit Shah's acumen and ability to



strengthen the organisational structure, streamline communication and enhance ground-level mobilisation. Its poll strategy is expected to focus on key States like Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra, which are traditionally considered electoral battlegrounds where the party will strive to maximise its seat count but may encounter tough resistance from satraps and the INDIA bloc. Though the BJP won an impressive 303 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, this time it would have to work harder as it would be pitched against united or partially united Opposition, which may affect its chances in one-on-one fights.

The BJP's traditional stronghold in the Hindi heartland may see a fight from the INDIA bloc, particularly in States where regional parties have a strong presence. The party would be factoring in the fact that the INDIA bloc's vote share in the recent Assembly elections was more than its own. It will need to navigate these regional dynamics and tailor its strategies to address local concerns. To counter the Opposition bloc, the BJP might need to engage in strategic alliance-building. The southern States, traditionally less receptive to the BJP's overtures, present another set of challenges for the party. The cultural, linguistic and political differences in States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana require a nuanced approach. The BJP will need to exhibit cultural sensitivity and acknowledge the distinct identities of these States. Focusing on State-specific issues and showcasing effective governance models will be vital in winning the trust of the southern electorate. The party's ability to strike a balance between national and regional dynamics, leveraging PM Modi's appeal and addressing local issues will determine its success in the upcoming electoral battle. The 2024 elections would test the resilience and adaptability of all political parties in the fray. The stakes are high, the winner takes it all!

PICTALK



Artists in the attire of Hindu deities celebrate Hanuman Jayanti at Patala Anjaneya Temple, in Bengaluru

Mimicry in the corridors of power

Political leaders are often the subject of ridicule and lampooning; they would best ignore it to look mature and tolerant

Kalyan Banerjee (67), a member of parliament representing Serampore Lok Sabha constituency, whose name has not been heard hitherto outside his home State of Bengal has been a national "celebrity" since early this week. His shortcut to stardom was facilitated by mimicking Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar, who is also the chairman of Rajya Sabha. What we saw on TV screens was Banerjee, a lawyer by profession, doing some kind of body movements, much to the amusement of the gang around him. Someone has to explain afterwards that he was lampooning the vice-president who is 72 years old and a lawyer like Banerjee.



was mimicking and not mocking the vice president. Easier said than done. Isn't it the same Banerjee who unleashed her police at Ambikesh Mahapatra, the Jadavpur University professor, who forwarded a cartoon that had ridiculed her? To forward an innocuous cartoon by e-mail was a cardinal sin according to the Trinamool Congress chief who is famous for her resistance to restrictions on freedom of expression. Mamta Banerjee's two faces of mockery and mimicking have confused her followers across the nation.

Those who belittle the mimicking of the vice-president of India by terming it as an art form should remember that Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister, threw out V P Menon, the all-powerful Secretary of State, on charges of aping him in a private function attended only by

select secretaries of the GoI. Menon, who was in his true form after a couple of sundowners reportedly mimicked Nehru in a get-together of his colleagues, all secretaries. One of the fifth columnists present on the occasion informed Nehru that Menon had made him a butt of jokes. The next day when Nehru met Menon, the former asked him if he had been told that Menon was good at mimicking others. "We are a free nation and it does not mean that we should sacrifice our sense of humour," retorted Menon. This marked the end of Menon's career in the corridors of power and he was kicked upstairs by none other than Nehru. This incident was recounted by MKK Nair, an IAS officer of the 1947 batch in his memoirs "With No ill will towards Anybody". For those who are not familiar with the name MKK Nair, he was Menon's Man Friday since the day the duo met each other. It is said that Nehru had a unique sense of humour. Some of his hangers-on (mainly journalists) are credited with this tom-tom to portray Nehru as a true lib-

eral. In this case, we have to go by the dictum all that glitters is not gold. The mimicry has emerged as the pastime of the Kerala population. Mimicry artists are very much in demand. Some of the top film stars like Mammooty, Jai Ram, Harisree Ashokan, Ramesh Pisharody, and the Siddique-Lal duo, all had their roots in mimicry stages. They stole the lime-light by mimicking former chief ministers E K Nayanar, K Karunakaran, Oommen Chandi, A K Antony, and V S Achuthanandan. The quality of their show was such that Antony, the then chief minister, travelling by train from Thiruvananthapuram to Malabar asked a mimicry artist who was in the compartment that was it necessary for both of them to travel to Malabar. Even Pinarayi Vijayan has not escaped from the caricaturing by these artists. But they are unanimous in their decision not to hurt the characters they portray. It is time our politicians learn one or two tricks of the trade from these real stars. (The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer; views are personal)



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Atal Bihari Vajpayee: A politician and a gentleman

A poet, politician, statesman and a sophomore – remembering the legacy of Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary

Atal Bihari Vajpayee born on 25th December 1924, firmed up his determination to devote himself to a social and cultural cause, in free India. As a teenager, he was comprehending the national developments and had matured by 1947 to realise how tough a task it was for the nation to re-establish itself on the global stage, and simultaneously give its people what they needed to lead a dignified life. He understood the pulse of the people and was blessed with the gift of a flawless oratory that touched the hearts of the listener, both through his speeches, and also his poetry. He endeared himself to the masses, stuck dexterously to his ideological moorings in thick and thin.

Young Atal Bihari Vajpayee became a member of parliament in 1957 when he was only 33 years old. He was very young in the house of veterans of the freedom struggles. It was not only his oratorical skills that impressed everyone including the prime minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, but the content and intensity of analysis, understanding and inference that he presented before the people. He grew up as a talented young person liked and admired by all around him. A reference is often made to his having compared Prime Minister India Gandhi to Durga, after her admirably courageous handling of the war resulting out of the butchery of Pakistan on its people, and the unprecedented rush of refugees to India. As the major leader of the Opposition, Vajpayee unequivocally gave all the credit to the Prime Minister and praised the defence forces! Whether he used the phrase Durga or not becomes immaterial. Let one also recall that the entire opposition and the people of India –negligible minor exceptions apart – stood firmly behind the leader of the nation. We are a free country, but were we successful in sustaining the democratic values in the true sense, as new generations of politicians entered the precincts of the parliament? The decline could well be understood if one recalls the episode of April 17,



1999, when a no-confidence motion against the Vajpayee government was put to vote in the Lok Sabha! While some of the constituents of the NDA played truant, there was a real serious lapse that would go into history as a dark spot.

Girdhar Gomango had taken over as the Congress chief minister of Odisha but had not resigned from the Lok Sabha seat. He was specifically asked to fly to New Delhi and vote against the Vajpayee government. He did cast his vote! Had he not, there would have been a tie, and the speaker could have saved the government.

The political chaos was so complex that the opposition could not offer any alternative, and the Lok Sabha had to be dissolved, and the TINA factor worked, and Vajpayee continued as the Prime Minister! Historians shall incisively examine whether this Girdhar Gomango vote heralded a new chapter on the decline of political ethics! To me, it was an instance of ethical adherence on the part of Vajpayee, who could have asked for a recount, and would certainly have won! He did not indulge in any



VAJPAYEE HAD THE GIFT OF SARASWATI, THE TENDERNESS OF HEART, AND THIS WAS HIS ART OF WINNING THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE. HE WAS AFFECTIONATE AND EMPATHETIC. ADVERSITIES COULD NEVER DEMORALISE HIM

maneuverings which became a common practice in later years.

The strength of Indian democracy was re-iterated when Vajpayee submitted his resignation after a one-vote defeat! Vajpayee's decision to go ahead with Pokhran -II and the manner he withstood all pressures during the Kargil War were two of the most courageous instances of decision-making. Prime Minister Vajpayee continued the policies of liberalisation and globalisation as accepted by India in the times of P.V. Narasimha Rao and his finance minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh. Additional economic reforms introduced during his tenure of 1998 to 2004, resulted in India maintaining a GDP growth rate of 8%, the inflation level came down to around 4% and foreign exchange reserves were flourishing. It was a daring step to end the monopoly of government telecom companies. It also led to competition and hence lowering of call tariffs. Vajpayee was held as the father of modern telecom in India. Mobile phone connectivity was very heartening not only in the life of common men but its availability also removed an irksome

hurdle that was often a point of complaint by the foreign investors.

Vajpayee could take a long-term view of the developmental initiatives that could help India in decades ahead, not necessarily thinking in terms of the next election only. In his long parliamentary life, it would be impossible to find someone who did not like him as a person, ideological orientations being another matter.

Vajpayee had the gift of Saraswati, the tenderness of heart, and this was his art of winning the hearts of people. He was affectionate and empathetic. Adversities could never demoralise him, rather these occasions gave him greater determination to succeed. He accepted challenges. For, party management was an art and not a craft as practised by the new generation of most politicians. His poetry indicates his concern for the nation and the people. Most of his time was spent in opposition, but I never found him desolate, or withdrawn.

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. He is also the Atal Fellow at the PMML, Teen Murthi, New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WAR AFFECTING GLOBAL ECONOMY

Sir — Fifty years after the last Arab-Israel war (1973), again on 7th October 2023, Hamas the prime Palestine militant group launched a surprise, daring and deadly attack with barrages of rockets leaving a devastating trail of death and destruction. There is a bigger threat to the global economy due to the attacks by Iranian-backed Yemen's Houthi militants on the shipping vessels crossing the Red sea-suez canals route, which has already badly disrupted international maritime trade, it has prompted the re-routing of the hundreds of large cargo-ships via southern tip of Africa to escape drone and missile attack by Houthis in the Red sea area, a much longer route adding another 10-14 days of the voyage, adding extra cost and delays potentially affecting global trade and contributing to inflation.

Hence the Israel-Hamas conflict desperately calls for world powers to bring a truce at the earliest, if the oil prices increase and ships take longer routes it will badly affect most global economies and its ramifications will be seen in days to come in all sectors of the economy, today crude oil prices are hovering around 85 dollars today.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

PARLIAMENT OVERTURNS SC VERDICT

Sir — Free and fair elections are part of the basic structure of the constitution and the Election Commission (EC) is its cornerstone – its independence and credibility must be guarded and strengthened at any cost. But to win the election the way the Modi government overturned the Supreme Court's order that had ruled that the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) shall be made by the President based on the advice tendered by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or leader of the largest Opposition party in the House, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Instead, the highly contentious Bill has dropped the Chief Justice of India from the

Three bills passed without debate



The 146 suspended MPs could hardly have expected their protest to lead to their suspension for the remainder of the parliamentary session. Their demand for a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah or Prime Minister

Narendra Modi was genuine given the unprecedented nature of the security breach. However, using their absence from the two Houses the government has been able to pass three controversial new criminal law Bills and sundry others without any debate.

Had a proper debate been allowed just days before the current session of Parliament was coming to an end, it is quite likely that the Bills would not have become law so easily. However, now with the three criminal law Bills having the stamp of the legislature, the role of the courts has become marginal. By inviting suspension, however unjustified, has the Opposition once again played into the hands of the government and the ruling BJP?

MT Farooqi | Chennai

selection panel and the new Bill proposes that the "Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of—(a) the Prime Minister—Chairperson; (b) the Leader of Opposition in the House of the People—Member; (c) a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister—Member." It's nothing but to grab voting power under any circumstances, and for this, the Centre has defied the Supreme Court order by dropping the CJI from the selection panel. After CJI dropped from the CEC selection panel, there was a time when Tirunelai Narayana Iyer Seshan's EC meant 'electoral credibility' but today it means 'elections compromised'.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

CHENNAI BOOK FAIR

Sir — The 47th Chennai Book Fair will be inaugurated by the TN Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on January 3, 2024. Over the years the annual Chennai Book Fair has become an important event in the cultural calendar of the city. Blissfully enough, BAPASI, the organisers of the fair, has decided to increase the number of stalls this year. This

reiterates the fact that the physical market for books will continue to grow despite the invasion of e-books. Though e-book readers have become a common sight, traditional books still have their evangelists.

There are plenty of reasons why a printed book is always preferred over an e-book. 1) The light emitted from the screen places additional stress on the eyes, leading to increased fatigue and even headaches. 2) Readers are less likely to get distracted when reading a printed book. 3) They can feel their progress through a course with a printed book by gauging how much they have read, whereas an e-book doesn't offer the same level of satisfaction. 4) Print books simply work anywhere and anytime, as no batteries, chargers or internet connections are needed. The feel of the paper, its fragrance, sharing it with our loved ones, its images and illustrations, flexibility – all make a printed book way ahead of an e-book. Needless to say, a printed book is a secret door to an undiscovered world of delight and success.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS UBIQUITOUS, EVERYTHING

But some people find it hard to accept
as they are too cynical in approach

AJIT KUMAR **BISHNOI**

There is a verse in the Bhagavad-Geeta, that goes like this, “After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus as everything is very rare.” (7.19) Lord Krishna spoke this verse. I have been reading the Geeta for more than three decades. I kind of didn’t take this verse seriously, because its purport did not sink in. Now having many experiences in this regard, I am beginning to have faith in God’s words.

I will share some experiences with my readers. I will take up a few verses and explain how they made sense to me; and how I experienced the veracity of them. The first one has to be verse # 7.16, “Four kinds of virtuous people worship Me. These are a distressed person, an inquisitive man, a seeker of wealth and a wise person.” I have been highly distressed, with many kinds of fears, anxieties, etc. Finding no relief elsewhere, I turned to God with some sincerity. My initial reaction was somewhat mixed. Maybe God was helping, maybe nothing like this was happening. Having exhausted all other options, I pursued. Gradually, I began to find the connection between my prayers and what relief I was getting. Surely, I was attracted to the other part of the quoted verse about becoming a seeker of wealth. There was some evidence that God was being generous to me. Wasn’t Sanjay quite convinced about it, when he said, “Where there is the Yogeshwar Shri Krishna and where there is the archer Arjuna, there will be opulence, victory, wealth and morality (dharma). This is my view.” (18.78) It gradually became my view also, as I benefited.



Now greedy for more, I sought guidance from God. Is He not omniscient? Wouldn't He know everything? This will eliminate my endless search for answers. Lord Krishna promised this, "From Me only memory, knowledge and removal of delusion takes place." (15.15) Surely, guidance in the form of instructions, and advice from near and dear ones, who act as mediums of God, began to become available. And I started to taste what was promised, "By being especially kind to them, I, situated within, destroy the darkness, born of ignorance, by the shining lamp of knowledge. (10.11)

Over some time, I began to get out of trouble, because God, was helping, which Lord Krishna has promised, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace." (18.58) Buoyed by such success, I focused on becoming more conscious, as instructed in verse #18.65, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me." Patiently, I started doing these spiritual practices. It wasn't easy because they went against my nature, which was for lusty enjoyment. Taking the next step was still more difficult, which was "Take My shelter only." (18.66) God has left no doubt what is needed to be done, which is, "In all respects take shelter of Him (God) only.

So, what should we conclude? There is too much evidence believe that God is everything. But it is hard for just anyone to accept this fact; this has to be realized over a long period. That is why Lord Krishna has stated that such a soul is very rare. One has to have faith and get started. The other option is not to accept. Then, one loses what all God can give, which is a lot in this place of misery. I will continue the way I am progressing I believe in, "Whatever you do; whatever you eat; whatever offering you make; whatever you give in charity; whatever austerities you perform, you do that as an offering to Me." (9.27) Who controls 'karmaphalas' (results of our acts)? God of course.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Cricket Australia launches Multicultural Action Plan




ASHUTOSH MISRA

As Indo-Australian relations continue to thrive, cricket will continue to add ballast at various levels—sporting, community and diplomatic, MAP can be a major catalyst



Australian demography has undergone a dramatic transformation, with communities originating from South Asia, predominantly Indian, making a significant presence across Australian society. According to the Australian Census 2021, South Asians are amongst the fastest-growing populations including 30% of Australians born overseas. Of these 48.5% of the Australian population are multicultural and 4% (1.1 million) have a South Asia birth or descent. Since 2013, Indian migrants recorded a 128% rise (from 295,000 to 673,000), Sri Lankan 53% (86,000 to 132,000), Nepalese 392% (25,000-123,000), Pakistan 200% (30,000-90,000) and Bangladesh 82% (28,000-51,000). This demographic transformation has not escaped Cricket Australia's attention which launched the pathbreaking Multicultural Action Plan (MAP) 2023-2027 on 22 December informed by hundreds of hours of research and engagement across the community. Supported by the Australian Government Legacy Fund, the MAP primarily aims at the South Asian community, wherein India is expected to be the key driver of growth in the coming years. Indian diaspora would soon overtake as the largest migrant community in Australia surpassing English, and the MAP strives to create a sense of belongingness and ownership amongst them. The MAP also highlights the 90,000 plus attendance during the India versus Pakistan match and the 85,000 plus attendance during the India versus Zimbabwe match during the ICC T20 World Cup in 2022 in Australia. Indian-Australian cricketers namely Lisa Sthalekar and Allana King, along with Harmanpreet Kaur the Indian captain feature prominently in it. In addition, Usman Khawaja, the Pakistani-origin cricketer holds a pivotal place for his inspirational struggle to make it into the national squad, and for his Foundation's Cricket Blast program



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for kids in schools and the community. The Multicultural Action Plan (MAP) hopes to create opportunities; break down barriers; build trust in relationships; and make a difference in the community. The rationale is simple: engage with the community which allows Cricket Australia to tap into the larger talent pool in the future, generate more participation and revenue from their participation, enlarge its fan base and encourage community members to take on more leadership roles. Cricket, therefore, is becoming a vehicle of social cohesion and unity for all Australians, and championing diversity and inclusion at all levels. In the coming years, MAP will roll out the following ten key deliverables: bespoke social cricket programs, products and tournaments; community coach and voluntary leadership program; working with foundations and partners to enhance talent pathways; elite coach and umpire bursary scheme; South Asian monitoring and leadership program; cultural awareness and unconscious bias training; new multicultural Ambassador program; engaging with new media channels with positive storytelling; new cultural festivals and enhanced match experience; and more personalised engagement through enhanced data capability. Of these, the cultural awareness and unconscious bias training is very well-thought-out and also critical for promoting greater understanding in Australian cricket of their unconscious bias and the cultural differences of the community and breaking down existing barriers in the game.

MAP is aiming for 100,000 South Asian registered participants in Australian cricket by 2027, and doubling the numbers of South Asian cultural background players in first-class teams as well as Women Big Bash League and Men's BBL and 2027 to 8%.

MAP is expected to boost recruitment of more employees from the South Asian background, since only 2% of South Asians were on Australian cricket boards, and executive teams in 2022, and over 18% were on the Cricket Australia payroll. Cricket Australia has also created a specialised position of Multicultural Officers at the Queensland Cricket and Western Australian Cricket Association to introduce new initiatives and engagement programs and gather feedback for the Action Plan.

Queensland Cricket's successful T20 format has also found a special mention in the MAP. In this format —the Multination Cup 2023 involving India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Afghanistan; Rising Stars U-13 Junior Tournament and Corporate Cup involving corporate companies have created a vast constituency of cricket lovers who have been either missing out due to time and physical constraints or limited opportunities. Undoubtedly, cricket continues to enrich Indo-Australian bilateral narrative and ties and the political leadership on both sides time and again very eloquently uses the appeal of the game to promote deeper understanding and friendship. In March 2023, Queensland Cricket led a delegation to Gujarat, spearheaded by its CEO Terry Svenson, deputy chair of the QC Board Ian Healy, former cricketer Adam Dale and the

author, to attend the fourth test match of the Border-Gavaskar series. Their visit coincided with the meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese at the majestic Modi stadium. This visit built Queensland Cricket's contacts with senior BCCI officials such as Jay Shah- BCCI secretary, Roger Binny-BCCI president, Dhanraj Nathwani-president Gujarat Cricket Association, Colonel Arvind Singh-COO, Gujarat Titans and several business leaders. The visit is expected to yield medium to long-term cricketing exchanges of players, coaches, administrators and teams between the two sides in the coming years. Queensland Cricket is also in discussion with the Baroda Cricket Association to reach an understanding to this effect and is also expected to pick up the threads of discussion with the Karnataka Cricket Association. As Indo-Australian relations continue to thrive, cricket will continue to add ballast at various levels—sporting, community, diplomatic and also commercial. In this context, Cricket Australia's Multicultural Action Plan is very timely in positioning the South Asian/Indian diaspora at the forefront of its strategy, which offers a historic opportunity for the Indian community champions to invoke their love of cricket for an creating an inclusive, diverse and multicultural society and a stronger Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

(The writer is CEO and Executive Director Institute for Australia India Engagement and Editor-In-Chief, of Australasia India News; views are personal)

Unmasking the silent epidemic threatening our youth

Indulging in new-age gateway products such as vaping is becoming a gateway for more individuals to initiate tobacco use

In the ever-evolving landscape of tobacco use, a new spectre looms large—New-Age Gateway Products including Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), heat-not-burn (HNB), e-hookah, e-cigarettes and Vapes. Beyond the familiar realms of smoking, this trend is not just a fad; it's a burgeoning concern with far-reaching consequences. Delving into the heart of the matter, we confront an escalating crisis that extends beyond traditional boundaries, ensnaring individuals including children globally in a web of lifelong addiction. Recent studies underscore the alarming trend that indulging in New-Age Gateway Products such as vaping is becoming a gateway for more individuals,

GIRDHAR J **GYANI**

especially young adults, to initiate tobacco use. A notable survey reveals that a significant number of young people are getting hooked on e-cigarettes which can have a dangerous impact. This shift in initiation patterns raises serious concerns about the long-term health consequences and the potential for a new generation to be ensnared in the clutches of addiction.

One critical aspect of this issue is the data suggesting that these New-Age Gateway Products are not a substitute for smoking as pushed by international tobacco companies but a distinct and powerful initiator of addiction of a different nature. Several studies indicate that the number of individuals trying vaping is fast surpassing those who take up

smoking. The allure of flavours, discreet packaging, and the misconception that vaping is less harmful contribute to its growing popularity, particularly among the youth.

An Australian expert recently addressed the Members of the Scottish Parliament, shedding light on a disconcerting reality — the vaping industry seems to have a profound interest in cultivating a new generation of lifelong customers. The marketing strategies employed by these international tobacco companies are designed to appeal to younger demographics, creating a concerning link between the rise in vaping initiation and the long-term goals of these corporations. The expert's testimony emphasizes the urgent

need for regulatory measures to curb the influence of these entities on the youth. While traditional smoking has long been associated with health risks, these New-Age Gateway Products introduce a different set of concerns. E-cigarettes often contain high levels of nicotine, a highly addictive substance. The ease with which one can access and use these devices, coupled with enticing flavours, makes them particularly appealing to young individuals. It is not uncommon for those who start with vaping to transition to an addictive model soon, amplifying the potential for lifelong addiction and its associated health hazards. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also expressed apprehension about

the impact of vaping on public health. The organization highlights the need for comprehensive regulations to address the risks associated with these products, ranging from their appeal to minors to the potential for serving as a gateway to other substance use. Governments worldwide are grappling with the challenge of crafting policies that strike a balance between harm reduction for existing smokers and protecting the youth from the allure of vaping. In light of these findings, policymakers, public health officials, and communities must collaborate on effective strategies to curb the rising tide of initiation to New-Age Gateway Products. Education campaigns targeting both parents and students can play a pivotal

role in dispelling myths surrounding vaping and its perceived harmlessness. Additionally, stringent regulations must be put in place to restrict the marketing outreach of these New-Age Gateway Products companies that seem intent on creating a new generation of addicts. There is a need to advocate for a holistic approach around stringent enforcement on the ground to address the vaping epidemic. This includes robust educational initiatives, evidence-based policy reforms, and collaboration with experts and lawmakers to create a comprehensive framework that safeguards the well-being of our youth. By acknowledging the distinct threat posed by New-Age Gateway Products and taking decisive action, we

can work towards mitigating the long-term consequences of this burgeoning public health crisis.

While it is alarming that a vast majority of children are unaware that these New-Age Gateway Products are already banned in India, access to these products seems to be at ease for those seeking them. Even law enforcement at the grassroots level needs to be made aware of this, or else porous and mis-declared imports into the country and their easy availability through those having access to school children can make this a serious upcoming health disaster waiting to happen.

(The author is Director General, Association of Healthcare Providers; Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Nearly 75,000 sellers on Meesho hit double digit growth

Around 75,000 sellers achieved double-digit growth while over 20,000 sellers witnessed a 10-times jump in their business on Softbank-backed e-commerce firm Meesho, the company said on Sunday. Meesho is the first unicorn e-commerce firm to have reported profit this year and it claims to have maintained the profitability since it first reported the performance in July. The company claimed that nearly 10,000 Meesho sellers crossed the Rs 1 crore sales mark and 130,000 registered sales of over Rs 1 lakh during 2023. Around 60 per cent of these sellers come from small towns like Avinashi, Bharuch, Fiazabad and Silchar", Meesho said. Meesho said that it added around 7 lakh new sellers this year taking the total number to 15 lakh this year. The company recorded transactions for 14 crore customers and claimed that nearly 80 per cent of the orders came from tier 2 and smaller markets. Meesho said that it recorded a unique pattern of customers placing maximum orders on Sunday.



‘Green shoots visible on corporate lending side’

Green shoots are beginning to become visible as far as investment cycle is concerned led by government spending in the infrastructure sector, Kotak Mahindra Bank whole-time director Shanti Ekambara said. "I think the last 18 months have been very good on the consumer credit side but you are beginning to see green shoots even in the investment cycle," she said. The government focus on infrastructure development in the last three years has created space for capital expenditure by the private sector as well. "I think it is moving from infrastructure led by government spending to capex although in a small way but I think that is going to build up," she said. Asked about RBI's tightening norms for unsecured consumer credit, she said, whenever the regulator perceives excess, they do so. NBFC and fintech have been aggressive on lending small ticket unsecured loan in the last 6 to 12 months.



HOP Electric eyes three-fold rise in sales

HOP Electric is targeting up to a three-fold rise in its annual sales in 2024 and is preparing to launch an electric motorcycle equivalent to the mass market entry level bikes of conventional engines to shore up volumes, according to the company Founder & CTO Rahul Gupta. The company, which has two electric scooters and an electric bike in its portfolio, is also looking to raise around USD 25 million next year to fund production capacity expansion. "In the last three years, we have been growing 100 percent each year. I think 2024 will be no different," Gupta said when asked about the outlook for the next year. On absolute sales volumes, he said, "This year I think we will sell about 20,000 electric scooters and motorcycles and next year we will be trying to push it to around 50,000 to 60,000 units." When asked about future product plans, he said the company has been working on its new platform 'Nimbus' to develop an electric bike equivalent to a 100 cc conventional engine motorcycle.



No takers for rupee payment for oil imports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's push for rupee to be used to pay for import of crude oil has not found any takers as suppliers have expressed concern on repatriation of funds and high transactional costs, the oil ministry told a parliamentary standing committee.

The default payment currency for all contracts for import of crude oil is US dollar as per the international trade practice. However, in a bid to internationalise the Indian currency, the Reserve Bank of India on July 11, 2022 allowed importers to pay with rupees and exporters be paid in rupee.

While there has been some success with non-oil trade with a select few countries, rupee continues to be shunned by oil exporters. "During FY 2022-23, no crude oil imports by oil PSUs was settled in Indian rupee. Crude oil suppliers (including UAE's ADNOC) continue to express their concern on the repatriation of funds in the preferred currency and also highlighted high transactional costs associated with conversion of funds along with exchange fluctuation risks," the oil ministry told the



FY 2022-23, no crude oil imports by oil PSUs was settled in Indian rupee. Crude oil suppliers (including UAE's ADNOC) continue to express their concern on the repatriation of funds in the preferred currency and also highlighted high transactional costs associated with conversion of funds along with exchange fluctuation risks.

parliamentary department related standing committee. The ministry, whose submissions are part of the committee's report which was tabled in Parliament last week, said Indian Oil Corporation

(IOC) has informed that it incurred high transaction costs as crude oil suppliers pass on the additional transactional costs to IOC."

The RBI, it said, had last year permitted opening of rupee vostro accounts in the partner trading country. Under this mechanism, Indian importers undertaking imports through this mechanism shall make payment in Indian rupee which shall be credited into the special Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country, against the invoices for the supply of goods or services from the overseas seller/supplier.

"Payments for crude oil can be made in Indian rupee, subject to the suppliers' complying with regulatory guidelines in this regard," the ministry said. "Currently, Reliance Industries Ltd and oil PSUs do not have an agreement with any crude oil supplier to make purchases in Indian currency for supply of crude oil."

Global client terminates US\$ 1.5 bn deal with Infosys

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT services firm Infosys has said that a global company has decided to terminate a multi-year contract worth US\$ 1.5 billion with it. On Sept 14, 2023, Infosys announced a pact with a global company to offer enhanced digital experiences alongside modernisation and business operations services leveraging Infosys platforms and AI (Artificial Intelligence) solutions.

In a BSE filing on Saturday, Infosys said the global company has now elected to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the parties will not be pursuing the master agreement." Infosys also said the stock market intimidation was in continuation to a disclosure made on September 14, 2023, with respect to an MoU with the global company which was subject to parties entering into a master agreement.

On the said date, Infosys informed BSE that it entered into an MoU with the global company to provide enhanced digital experiences, along with modernisation and business operations services, leveraging Infosys.

Increasing exports and reducing imports new way ahead for patriotism: Gadkari



"Till this import is not stopped, terrorism will not stop across the world. The aim of my life is to stop import of petrol and diesel. I consider it to be a new freedom for India when not a drop of petrol and diesel is imported into the country."

PNS ■ PANAJI

Increasing exports and reducing imports is the new way ahead for patriotism and "swadeshi", and it will be a "new freedom" for India when not a drop of petrol or diesel is imported, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Sunday.

Addressing the 'Sagar Manthan 2.0' event organised by weekly magazine 'Panchjanya', the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways also said stopping the import of petrol and diesel was linked to arresting terrorism in the world.

"Till this import is not stopped, terrorism will not stop across the world. The aim of my life is to stop import of petrol and diesel. I consider it to be a new freedom

for India when not a drop of petrol and diesel is imported into the country," he said.

"The import bill for petrol and diesel stands at Rs 16 lakh crore now. If we reduce this import, the money we save will go to the poor. That is why we have introduced alternative fuels like bio fuel. Reduction in imports and increase in exports is the way forward for patriotism and swadeshi," he asserted.

Gadkari said the size of the automobile industry in India was Rs 7 lakh crore when he took over (in 2014) and now it was Rs 12.5 lakh crore, adding the sector gives employment to 4.5 crore people.

It is the industry that gives highest GST to state governments and the Centre, he added.

Asserting that the country's automobile industry would be number one in the world in the next five years, Gadkari said, "Maximum imports are happening in the automobile industry. If we want to become vishwaguru (world leader) and USD five trillion economy, then we have to become number one in exports."

Three months ago, India jumped from seventh position to third in the automobile exports sector, surpassing powerhouses like Japan.

"I can tell you we will be number one in the next five years based on our initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat (self reliant India) and sushaasan (good governance)," the Union minister claimed.

India's economic growth to boost demand of corporates

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Leading credit rating firm Fitch Ratings expects that India's resilient economic growth will boost demand of the corporates.

In its latest research report on 'India Corporates: Sector Trends 2024', Fitch said that this is a sequel to the robust performance of the corporates in 2023 and will offset weakness from slowing growth in the key overseas markets. Rising demand and easing input cost pressure should boost margins of the corporates in the next financial year, Fitch said.

Fitch said that with strong domestic demand growth, it is expected that India will be among the world's fastest-growing countries, with resilient GDP growth of 6.5 per cent during the fiscal 2024-25. This is despite a challenging global backdrop and the cumulative impact of the recent monetary tightening, it said.

Sectors like cement, electricity and petroleum products are expected to witness a strong demand with high-frequency data in 2023 sustained well above pre-COVID pandemic levels.

Fitch said that India's improving infrastructure will also boost steel demand. Slowing down in the US and the Eurozone is likely to moderate growth of the IT services.

Stock markets likely to remain range-bound

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets are likely to remain range-bound in this holiday-shortened week amid a lack of any major domestic triggers, analysts said.

Stock indices may also face volatility during the week amid the monthly derivatives expiry on Thursday. Equity markets would remain closed on Monday for Christmas.

"This week, as global cues remain sparse due to the Christmas holiday, domestic market dynamics are expected to steer sector and stock-specific movements," Santosh Meena, Head of Research at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.



With limited cues, the December F&O expiry could inject volatility into the markets, Meena added. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 376.79 points or 0.52 per cent and the Nifty dipped 107.25 points or 0.49 per cent.

The decline in the markets came after a record-breaking rally where both the benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty hit their all-time high levels on December 20.

"While India's equity market valuation is expensive, they may remain elevated due to the increased likelihood of a stable government at the centre. Additionally, with FPI holdings at a 10-year low and potential foreign buying in the debt market ahead of India's inclusion in the JP Morgan Emerging Market Government Bond Index, may provide some stability to the INR."

FPIs bring Rs 57,300-cr due to stability, robust growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have injected over Rs 57,300 crore into the Indian equity markets this month so far owing to political stability, robust economic growth, and a steady decline in the US bond yields.

With this, total investment by FPIs surpassed Rs 1.62 lakh crore this year. Going forward, the New Year is expected to witness declines in U.S. interest rates, and FPIs are likely to increase their purchases in 2024, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

According to the data, FPIs



made a net investment of Rs 57,313 crore in Indian equities in this month (till December 22). This was the highest monthly inflow by them in a year. This

came following a net investment of Rs 9,000 crore in October.

Before this overseas investors withdrew 39,300 crore in August and September, data

with the depositories showed.

The robust inflow from FPIs into the Indian stock markets can be attributed to various factors. Primary among these are political stability and positive sentiments prevailing in the Indian markets, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Also, the country's stable and robust economy, coupled with impressive corporate earnings and a string of Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), has attracted foreign investors to explore investment opportunities in India, he added.

421 infra projects hit by cost overrun of Rs 4.40Lcrore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 421 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.40 lakh crore in November this year, an official report said.

According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,831 projects, 421 reported cost overrun and 845 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,831 projects was Rs 25,10,577.59 crore and their anticipated completion cost was...Rs 29,50,997.33 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,40,419.74 crore (17.54 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for November 2023 said.

According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till November 2023 was Rs 15,58,038.07 crore, which is 52.80 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

Mcap of three of 10 most valued firms jump Rs 70,312.7 cr

Reliance biggest winner

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of three of the 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 70,312.7 crore last week, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest winner, amid volatile market conditions.

From the top 10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, ITC, Bharti

Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) faced erosion to the tune of Rs 68,783.2 crore.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 376.79 points or 0.52 per cent after a record-breaking rally.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 47,021.59 crore to Rs 17,35,194.85 crore.

Hindustan Unilever added Rs 12,241.37 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,05,043.25 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation climbed Rs 11,049.74 crore to Rs 12,68,143.20 crore. However, the market capital-



isation (mcap) of ICICI Bank plummeted Rs 30,235.29 crore to Rs 6,97,095.53 crore.

The valuation of TCS eroded by Rs 12,715.21 crore to Rs 13,99,696.92 crore and that of State Bank of India declined by Rs 10,486.42 crore to Rs

5,68,185.42 crore.

The mcap of Infosys fell by Rs 7,159.5 crore to Rs 6,48,298.04 crore and that of ITC diminished by Rs 3,991.36 crore to Rs 5,67,645.03 crore.

Bharti Airtel's valuation dipped Rs 2,108.17 crore to Rs 5,56,134.58 crore and that of LIC declined by Rs 2,087.25 crore to Rs 5,01,635.57 crore.

In the ranking of top 10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India, ITC, Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India.

‘Cyber risks biggest threat to Indian organisations’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber risks are cited as the biggest threat faced by Indian organisations with 38 per cent of respondents feeling highly or extremely exposed to it, says a survey.

With this, cybersecurity has jumped two spots from number three to number one on the risk radar when compared to the 2022 Global Risk Survey, the PwC's 2023 Global Risk Survey- India edition stated.

PwC said the final results of the survey are based on 3,910 survey responses from Business and Risk Management leaders (CEO, board, risk management, operations, technology, finance, audit) across 67 territories providing their views on

the status and direction of risk in their organisation. 163 Indian organisations were a part of this survey.

Other digital and technology risks are also top concerns for business leaders in India (at 35%). To address the challenges, Indian organisations are making bold investments in cybersecurity with more than half of the respondents planning to invest in cybersecurity tools (55 per cent) and AI, machine learning and automation technologies (55 per cent) in the next 1-3 years, according to survey findings. To back these investments, 71 per cent of Indian organisations are gathering and analysing cybersecurity and IT data for risk management and opportunity



identification. Globally 61 per cent of the organisations are doing the same.

Sivarama Krishnan, Partner and Leader, Risk Consulting, PwC India said that the 2023 Global Risk Survey shows that Indian

business leaders are not only demonstrating an increased appetite for taking risks but are also doing a reasonable job of identifying opportunities presented by risks.

"This mindset shift is critical for an organisation's

progress- it will not only help businesses be better prepared to manage risks, but also grow, build resilience, deliver outcomes and create value for all stakeholders," Krishnan added. The survey also showed that 99 per cent of Indian business leaders are confident their organisation can balance growth with managing risk effectively, of which 66 per cent are very confident of the same. Globally these figures stand at 91 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively.

Further, Indian businesses are seeing technology disruptors as opportunities, with 69 per cent of Indian executives seeing Generative AI as an opportunity (against 60 per

cent globally).

The survey also revealed how organisations are taking the help of emerging technologies such as GenAI for risk management, with 48 per cent of Indian enterprises having deployed AI and machine learning for automated risk assessment and response to a large extent. This is slightly lower than the global response of 50 per cent.

To leverage the positives brought in by risks and disruptions, the survey said 88 per cent of Indian organisations are actively investing in building resilience in their ecosystem over the last 12 months. Globally, 77 per cent of the businesses are investing in the same.

IIT-Bombay's Class of 1998 gifts Rs 57 cr to alma mater

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IIT-Bombay's class of 1998 has gifted Rs 57 crore to its alma mater as part of the silver jubilee reunion celebrations -- the highest combined contribution by a single class.

The donation, by the likes of private equity firm Silver Lake managing director Apoorv Saxena and Peak XV managing director Shaileendra Singh, breaks the previous record of Rs 41 crore by the Class of 1971 for their golden jubilee celebrations.

In a statement, the students said the contribution was made by over 200-plus alum-

ni including major donations from top global executives Vector Capital MD Anupam Banerjee, Dileep George of AI Research, Google Deepmind, Great Learning CEO Mohan Lakshminarayanan, Colopast SVP Manu Varma, Silicon Valley entrepreneur Sundar Iyer, Indovance co-founder and CEO Sandeep Joshi, and Srikanth Shetty, Chief Growth Officer, Americas, HCL.

Subhasis Chaudhuri, Director, IIT Bombay, said, the contribution by the Class of 1998 "will help accelerate IIT Bombay's growth and contribute to our shared vision of excellence".

'Working with Saurabh Shukla in Dry Day is like going to acting school'

Actress Kiran Khoje, known for her work in movies like *Talvar*, *Hindi Medium* and *Super 30*, has now made her OTT debut with *Dry Day*, and shared her experience on working with actor-director Saurabh Shukla.

The comedy drama starring Jitendra Kumar, Shriya Pilgaonkar, and Annu Kapoor in the lead is written and directed by Saurabh Shukla.



Kiran feels working under the guidance of Saurabh is the best thing happened to her in her acting career.

"Working under writer-director Saurabh Shukla in *Dry Day* is like going to acting school. He is brilliant on set, they way the world knows

him is very happy go lucky and jolly person -- he is exactly the same on the set as well. The most rewarding factor for me was I always went to the set with a happy mood. That's a big thing for any actor," said Kiran.

Opening up about her role, the actress said: "I am playing a character called Janki in the film who is a kind of a catalyst. We all stay in a fictitious village where all men have a problem with drinking. Janki is someone who is obviously very upset with this problem and, like others, my character believes men should get rid from the drinking habits."

"Though I have been part of some great films before, I have a full fledged role in this film. Janki



what's brewing?

Matthew Perry was 'still thinking about taking drugs' despite sobriety

Late star Matthew Perry's ex-girlfriend said he "always had major drug problems."

Perry, who battled addiction to alcohol and drugs for a number of years, was found dead in his hot tub towards the end of October at the age of 54.

His former flame Kayti Edwards has alleged that when they were together, his addiction was always on his mind even after he had got clean as she recalled some of the drastic things she had done to help him.

"I was at Matthew's place in the Hollywood Hills. He was in a bad way. He had been getting high all night on a plethora of drugs, most likely crack cocaine and other substances," she told The Sun on Sunday, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"I found Matthew on the couch with his hands superglued to his legs -- it was desperately sad. I had to use nail polish remover and olive oil to free him. We were literally ripping the hair from his legs and he had red, raw patches left behind, it was pretty horrific. Matthew always had major drug problems. Even when he was clean and going through rehab, he was still thinking about taking drugs." Kayti previously claimed that even though it was thought that Matthew had drowned in his hot tub, she remained uncertain that that was the full story.

She said: "There are a lot of things that aren't adding up for me. I don't believe he just drowned in his Jacuzzi, that doesn't sound right. I know Matthew and I know that he wouldn't have just drowned. I think he might have taken pills in the week leading up to this."

"They said there were no prescription painkillers at the scene, which doesn't surprise me, because he didn't leave drugs lying around. He was paranoid and would take them all, so there wasn't any evidence, and then go out for more when he was ready to."

According to police, no drugs were found at the scene or any evidence of foul play, but Kayti felt suspicious when she saw what became his last social media post.

Just days before the tragedy, the '17 Again' star had referred to himself as 'Mattman' -- an alter ego he developed based on his obsession with Batman -- and Kayti alleged that this character would only come out when Matthew was intoxicated.

She said: "That Mattman thing was not something he did when he was sober. Mattman would come out when he was not sober and he felt kind of invincible. I was around when he was getting high, although I was not getting high with him, and when I would say maybe he should cool it a little bit with the drugs, he would say, 'No, I'm Mattman.'" Kayti, who dated Matthew in the late 2000s but remained in touch with him and last spoke to him shortly before he released his memoir 'Friends, Lovers And The Big Terrible Thing' in November 2022 -- also claimed that the TV star always yearned to be in the water when he was high.

She said: "One time, his neighbour in Hollywood Hills found Matthew naked and high in his swimming pool. I had to go over there and get him out of his neighbour's pool. He had a thing with water when he was doing drugs. He always wanted to be in the pool or the Jacuzzi."



Mahesh Bhatt hosts talk show on lives of 13 prominent Sikhs of India

Renowned filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt is hosting a talk show with the series *Pehchaan: The Unscripted Show* on SonyLIV. *Pehchaan* promises to be an unprecedented and heart-touching journey into the lives of 13 prominent Sikhs of India.

Mahesh said: "Someone who has not heard of sugar will not know what it tastes like. *Pehchaan* has to be experienced. And though it is being region-holed as a chat show in the minds of many, but it's much more than that." "It is a very powerful emotional quotient which moves you and leaves you teary-eyed. What the Indian entertainment landscape lacks is intimate, upheld back conversations."

He continued: "*Pehchaan* hurls you into the hearts of people in their most vulnerable moments and from there you see them climb rung by rung towards hope. These

brave men have beard their hearts and spoke to me with heartfelt candor about their beautiful lives as they ploughed through from 'unbeautiful' moments." "These are the stories of lives led with courage and integrity -- an inspiration to anyone who watches it. I see myself as a new person after knowing these gentlemen and feel like I'm reborn after each interaction."



Known for films like *Ab Dilli Dur Nahin* and Darsheel Safary-starrer *Hukus Bukus*, producer Vinay Bhardwaj opens up about his latest show *Pehchaan*. He mentioned: "The hallmark of *Pehchaan* is its ability to go beyond the surface, inviting viewers to witness heart-touching conversations that have never been seen before on Indian television. With more than 13 episodes filled with powerful narratives, the show aims to showcase the incredible spirit of these Sikhs who have left an indelible mark on the country."

Each episode of *Pehchaan* is designed to unravel the untold stories, struggles, and triumphs that have shaped the lives of these exceptional Sikhs. The show will have more seasons to follow covering royal families, Brahmins and many other extraordinary people from different walks of life.

Vin Diesel tagged 'creepy' as 'cringeworthy' interview resurfaces amid assault claims

Hollywood star Vin Diesel, who has faced allegations of sexual assault from his former assistant, his reputation has put been even further into question after a past interview resurfaced.

The 56-year-old actor was accused of assaulting his assistant while filming *Fast and the Furious* and now, he is under even further scrutiny for acting "creepy" in a 2017 interview with Brazilian YouTube star which was shared on X, formerly known as Twitter, reports mirror.co.uk.

In the interview to promote his film *XXX: The Return of Zander Cage*, Vin Diesel acted extremely flirt-y with host, whom he described as "the most gorgeous girl in Brazil."

"God, you're so beautiful, you're so beautiful, man, am I right or wrong?" he said in the clip, addressing the camera crew.

He then added, "How am I supposed to do this interview?"

To which a shy-looking host responded, "Thank You." Despite her visible discomfort, he continued on, stating, "She's so beautiful. Let's get out of here, let's go have lunch. My god, I love her. Look how beautiful she is. God, I love her. Wow."

The YouTuber tried to change the subject, but he persisted with this behaviour.

The interview took a turn for the worse when the actor dropped to his knees and began crawling toward

Carol. "She's so f*****g beautiful it's like, you can't even do an interview with her."

"Oh my God, someone save me. When did this turn into a beautiful world? When did this turn into the most gorgeous girl in Brazil? When did this turn into I love you?" he asked as he stood to his feet. The YouTuber was left dumbfounded and kept saying "thank you" in response to his advancements.

A clip of the interview was shared to X. The user who shared the video gave their own commentary, writing, "I gotta say, I've always had a weird feeling about Vin Diesel since I saw this video years back. While disappointing, I can't say that the news

surrounding him rn is all that surprising."

Other users expressed their disapproval of Vin Diesel's behaviour.

"Yup. That video turned me right off of him. Disrespectful, unprofessional and predatory," one user wrote.

Another added, "I never liked watching his interviews and I'm not a big fan of most of his work so I had no idea he was this creepy. Like she's not flirting back so leave her alone."

"Literally just trying to do her job by interviewing him and he's making it impossible by being a creep," a third penned.

Vin Diesel has been accused of sexual assault by his former assistant Aitsa Jonasson.

Jonasson was hired by the production company One Race to organise the actor's personal affairs and attend parties with him.


The assault allegedly occurred in 2010 during filming of *Fast and the Furious*. She had reportedly been waiting for him outside of a hotel room for him to finish entertaining women. When the women left, he allegedly grabbed her wrist and pulled her onto the bed where he supposedly groped her and felt her up before she was able to escape.

He has denied the claims.




FUN


ARCHIE




GARFIELD



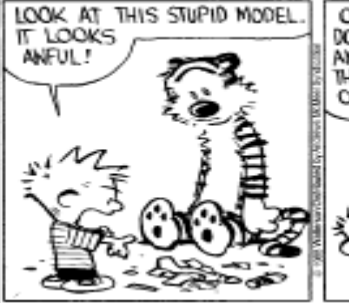
NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



CAVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

7	4	9	5	2	8	3	1	6
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5	6	8	3	7	1	2	9	4
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3	2	6	4	8	9	7	5	1
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Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row, or column must equal 45.

CROSSWORD

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13								
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19								

ACROSS

- Donate
- A warning tower for ships
- Wide awake and watchful
- Robbery
- Your mother's mother
- Stories
- The number of legs on a tripod
- A nice place to go out to for a meal
- A house for a pet rabbit
- A big Australian flightless bird
- Opposite of first
- An adult male deer
- Grow weary
- A place for ice skating

DOWN

- Don't
- Talk with in a friendly way
- Injured by a bullet
- Make well again
- Periods of 100 years
- Female children
- Wash the soap out of

SOLUTION

Z	I	G	Z	A	G	S	W	A	P	
E	E	L	E	P	A	I				
A	I	N	A	I	N	A	I			
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B	R	A	T	O	R	E				
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SHIKHA DUGGAL

Defined by his long acting career, Mahesh Thakur is personified by his use of colourful personas, locution, and undeniable swag. He hasn't consciously decided to stay relevant or reinvent. Roles across formats have come his way, and he's excitedly taken them on. Was he able to relate to the character he's seen playing in Sony Sab's latest show, *Aangan Aapno Kaa*? He explains, "It was fine with me helming a show that has a lot to do with the daughters first. The episodes seemed interesting on paper; it seemed like a good show in the making, so I said yes to the project without any further delay. What I genuinely like about my show is that it's really different from the daytime dramas that we see."

He was dealing with those emotions that came naturally to him, so it was not a big deal here. He can't seem to pinpoint any fault in the script, as of now! This is the liberty of working on television, he claims. You can show whatever you want, and you'll not be judged. "My on-screen daughters continue to call me Papa even when the camera isn't rolling. And I go, look girls, I am not that old; please get out of your characters," shares the *Hum Saath Saath Hain* fame.

Anand Babu, isn't he still popular with the same notoriety? Yes, he is. And here was our chance to take our interviewee back in time to learn about his two-decade-long career! The celebrity spills the beans: "*Ishqbaaz* was my last show. I enjoyed playing a negative character; the show was mounted in the most fashionable way on television. It wasn't planned; the publicity was just generated! In between, a couple of mythological and social dramas came my way, but I didn't have the time to invest in such long-running shows. So my criteria these days is to do one television show and everything else."

Finite shows are the best to be a part of, admits Mahesh, since they have a definitive storyline according to his analysis. Sharing his detailed experience in television and otherwise, we hear from the renowned, "A writer tends to get burnout faster than an actor. There is a limit to the story idea! So our television takes the route of the so-called generation leaps to not lose audiences. The writers have nothing to offer you now. In my view, they are still not able to retain all the viewers."

The business models used to be extremely different in the times of Doordarshan, he realized. The number game has a lot of pressure on television these days! The TRP speaks for the actor's run-time, and that's an utter disappointment in the purview of this popular actor. "That's why I prefer doing films because they monetize later and prioritize creativity in the opening. In tele-

vision, every week, one has to run behind the TRP chart and see what it has to say. We can't think above and beyond these TRPs. At the same instant, there are very few regular producers in the movies too! Case in point: Dharma Films or Rajshri Productions are constants. Branding is what the movie business is all about!"

Unfortunately, the actor confessed that he was branded as a son-in-law by Rajshri Productions. Well, how? We hear him say, "After 1999, I didn't understand the format of the movie business. I was busy accepting the role of a son-in-law because *Hum Saath Saath Hain* had become a magnanimous hit and became my claim to fame. From then on, my transitions started to become very difficult in movies. When I was approached for *Jai Ho*, although I was cast opposite Tabu, the brief that the production had come with was that we were looking for Salman Khan's brother-in-law. Now that I was sick and tired, I signed *Selfie* because Karan Johar promised me the role of manager for Akshay Kumar."

During our conversation, we picked up on the deed, where we got to know how Mahesh Thakur knows the Khans very well. He recalled some of the personal anecdotes with the family and shared, "Salman and I have studied at the same school. He's a year older than me. Sohail was a kid! Our homes were within walking distance. That was the time of Rajesh Khanna we were living in. We all knew Salman was the son of the eminent writer Salim Khan Sahab. Here comes one of the fondest and most personal memories that I share with Salman, wherein I can recall one of the cycling competitions we had in school. Now I had the first racing bicycle from Panama in the whole school! Everyone was fascinated. One of my classmates came to me and said, 'Hey, can I borrow your bicycle for the competition?' Of course not. But I had to be there at the competition knowing what was up with my bicycle and to brag a little that, hey, the bicycle just won is mine. But what happened next was unexpected! My classmate with the bicycle didn't win; it was Salman Khan who won the race. On a distinctive note, my friend Salman is an amazing guy. The stardom around him will never allow you to get to know the private kindness that he has for all of us. He has an incredible spirit in him, and that's why, when he got his first break in the industry, he turned out to be a pioneer for all the men out there to have a six-pack abs-wala body."

Actor Mahesh Thakur, who is currently seen in Sony Sab's latest show *Aangan Aapno Kaa*, gets candid with *The Pioneer* about getting on board for the show, his criteria for doing the projects, and more.

'I WAS SICK AND TIRED OF DOING THE ROLES OF A BROTHER-IN-LAW'

TELEVISION TAKES THE ROUTE OF THE SO-CALLED GENERATION LEAPS TO NOT LOSE AUDIENCES. THE WRITERS HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER YOU NOW.



'I broke rules, but no one was harmed; something more intense has happened recently'

TEJAL SINHA

Tera gham mera gham, meri jaan teri jaan, Aisa apna pyaar, Jaan pe bhi khelenge, tere liye le lenge sab se dushmani... Doesn't this lyric remind you of that one best friend of yours, who is no less than a family to you? We're sure it did! But this also proves a duo who has proved to be a real-life Jai-Veeru or let's say, the Jai-Veeru of the ongoing season of *Bigg Boss*. Yes, we're talking about Sunny Arya aka Tehelka, and Arun Srikanth Mashetty aka Achanak Bayanak. At a point in time, when we see bonds changing in the house, this bond has still been intact even after Sunny's eviction. Well, that's what we felt during our chat with him.

"I'm first of all very grateful that I got a chance to be at the *Bigg Boss* house and that I got a brother like Arun," begins Tehelka, who no doubt had made a 'Tehelka remark' this season. "Be it the tone, body language, or nature, everything had just gone along, and our vibes matched so well. That is something very rare. People say that only childhood friendship lasts; later friendship is not formed easily. Even if it does, it is one out of a hundred."

So God had left that one percent chance for me, where I was very much attached to Arun bhai. We had even promised each other that no matter what we did, we'd do it together and stand up for each other. We made sure not to be part of any gang, and that was when there were 15 people on one side and both of us on the other. We never took any support from any gang because there were also people who wanted to go with a number of people together. And that was never our nature. Just the two of us were overpowered by all of them."

No matter what, one thing that remained constant throughout was the way the duo stood up for each other. And he agrees too, and also, "Though we had to be with the other 15 people too when we didn't understand their nature itself, how could we even be with them? For us, the bond we shared was not just for the show but for a lifetime."

Well, no doubt Arun has been missing his brother-like friend a lot, and so has Tehelka too. And there's not just one thing he says that he doesn't miss about Arun. But one thing he points out is how people used to misunderstand his Hyderabad language. One thing we recalled was how emotional his eviction episode was—something that had happened for the first time on the show. "I was really worried about how these people would target this one person, and while going too, I ended up

saying, 'Mera bhai chote dil ka hai isse pare-shaan matt karna.' And that is what has been happening with him now. Vicky Bhai and Anurag have been especially taunting him, saying, 'Tera Tehelka nikal gaya.' He (Arun) has been very emotional towards me, and every time I see him sad or upset, I know he'll be missing me. He's even asked Vicky, bhai, if I'd come or not. In fact, in one of the episodes, he wore my jacket and was telling Aooru about me. It's obvious that he has gotten very low."

A reason behind his eviction is Abhishek. But even he did break down and didn't want Tehelka to go. As a person, he has had his maximum arguments and brawls crying for him. Was he fake then? We wondered, and Tehelka says, "People called me an 'Angry Man' in the house. I never disrespected anyone in the house, and if I had aggression and anger, I would have had brawls with all of them, not just one, Abhishek. He has always misbehaved with everyone, and when he misbehaved with Arun, I couldn't see that. I understood Abhishek's nature when he entered with Isha, who just fought with her so badly and then was nicely sitting with her. Then there was a day when I threw the utensils and made a narrative saying I threw a knife. He always knew how to make a scene out of everything and how he would be seen. So it is very evident that he was someone who would make an issue of a small thing. For instance, when I held his tee, that day he had slept peacefully, but when you fight with someone, I have a question: can you even sleep? Does he or she wait for a day and make a huge scene? That's all made up." Having never been around such an environment and all of a sudden getting into a house like *Bigg Boss*, he does feel getting irked is a normal thing. But "the way Abhishek misbehaves and does things, he feels he's doing the right thing, and cameras are capturing him. But Salman Khan had bashed him. When you are in this close environment, one would surely end up getting angry, but not the way he behaves."

But a point that struck our mind during this chat with him was the 10 rule breaks that were shown by Karan Johar. "I did break ten rules," he says, adding, "but no one was harmed. Talking of the episode where I held his tee, something four times intense had happened recently in the house of Vicky and Abhishek. So what would you call that? I told them in a task that 'yeh insaan apne guru ka saga nahi raha aur unke peeth pe chaaku maar diya.' The way he behaves, no one can understand his nature, and he recently used inappropriate words for Ankita Lokhande, who has no way of talking. When I was out of the show, many people, especially women, had told me that they didn't understand his nature."

Well, apart from all the chaos and brawls, one thing he assures our readers via our chit-chat is that once Arun is out, the duo is ready for 'Tehelka Machadenge'.

Adapting effective HR strategies for remote & hybrid workforces

A survey conducted among Indian professionals by Indeed revealed that 71% of the respondents chose flexibility as the top parameter while hunting for a job.

Amidst the ever-shifting nature of the modern workplace, remote and hybrid workforces have reshaped organizational structures and challenged the status quo. HR professionals now stand at the forefront of a unique landscape, facing distinctive challenges in this new paradigm.

Let's explore a few key strategies to tackle these challenges and understand the growing significance of HR technology in remote and hybrid work environments.

CONNECTING A DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

Surveys show that many remote workers continue to prefer remote work since it helps balance their work and personal life. But the challenge of connecting a distributed remote workforce is prevalent, with team members spread across different locations. Maintaining effective communication is essential to bridge the physical gap. Organizations can deploy centralized platforms to integrate multiple employee applications, fostering a cohesive work environment. Additionally, multimedia content, including interactive videos and surveys, can enhance internal communication, break silos, and promote collaboration.

PLUGGING THE SECURITY LOOPHOLES

The security of sensitive data is a significant concern in remote work environments. Robust data security protocols, including encryption, secure VPN (Virtual Private Network) access, and regular security training, help protect against security breaches and ensure compliance with data privacy regulations. Security measures must extend to both in-office and remote environments in hybrid work settings. Access controls, encryption, and policy audits are essential components of data security. Ensuring that all employees, regardless of their location, are well-versed in data protection measures is crucial.

MAINTAINING REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Remote work can introduce challenges to maintaining regulatory compliance, especially in industries with stringent regulations. HR teams must adapt their strategies to ensure that remote employees are compliant with relevant labor laws and regulations. In hybrid models, HR professionals need to navigate the complexities of compliance across different work settings and geographies. HR tech can assist in maintaining regulatory compliance by automating key processes such as record-keeping, reporting, and policy enforcement. It ensures accurate documentation of

employee data, tracks changes in labor laws, and provides alerts for compliance deadlines.

MONITORING EMPLOYEE PUNCTUALITY

Tracking employee punctuality can be challenging in remote settings. HR can implement time, attendance, and leave tracking software to set clear work-related expectations and ensure accountability. Many of the integrated HR Tech platforms have functionalities, like a mobile app and map-based tracking system, to make these tasks easy for HR professionals. In hybrid models, organizations need to adapt their tracking and employee service delivery systems to accommodate both in-office and remote work.

REGULATING THE INFORMATION FLOW

HR professionals need to prioritize structured communication channels, regular team check-ins, and virtual meetings to maintain a sense of connection and alignment. AI-based chatbots can help answer HR queries instantly and save time. Hybrid work environments require HR professionals to foster consistent communication between in-office and remote team members. Video/audio conferencing and collaboration platforms can help create a cohesive

work environment where information flows seamlessly. This bridges the gap between the physical and virtual workplaces of an organization.

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF HR TECHNOLOGY

HR technology plays a pivotal role in managing remote and hybrid workforces effectively, necessitating investments in automation. In a global survey of 1000 HR leaders, 83% identified the absence of the right HR tech as a challenge. In remote work, HR tech aids in communication, performance tracking, leave and attendance, and data security. Analytics tools can enhance visibility by efficiently analyzing remote employee data. Self-service features and mobile apps simplify processes. In hybrid work, centralized platforms can boost productivity and communication by integrating various employee applications. Core HR, performance management, and tracking tools can optimize contributions across settings.

The future of work is characterized by remote and hybrid workforces. HR professionals face the task of adapting their strategies to effectively address the distinctive challenges posed by these models. As the workplace continues to evolve, HR technology with modules for core HR, payroll management, leave & attendance, performance management, employee self-service, and compliance becomes increasingly indispensable.

(The author, Girish Rowjee, is the Co-founder and CEO of greyTHR.)

An eviction from India's most controversial show, *Bigg Boss*, that was no less than an emotional breakdown for the contestants and also for the audience, was that of Sunny Arya, aka Tehelka. The former contestant gets candid with *The Pioneer* about his bond with Arun, his eviction, and more.

India record maiden Test win over Australia

Win by 8 wickets in one off women Test

PTI ■ MUMBAI

It was a befitting end to India Women's first 'home season' of Test cricket in 28 years as they recorded a historic maiden victory over a venerable Australia in the one-off Test here on Sunday. On the final day, India produced their best both with the ball and bat to thwart a spirited Australian resurgence, first sparking a collapse in the visitors' ranks to snaffle the remaining five wickets for 28 and then knocking off a meagre target of 75 without much ado to script an eight-wicket win. Smriti Mandhana (38 not out) and Jemimah Rodrigues (12 not out) embraced each other in a warm hug when the objective of beating a world-dominating

side was accomplished, bringing back memories of India's shushed reaction in 2008 in Australia when MS Dhoni's side beat the hosts and made a statement by not indulging in any passionate celebrations. Playing more than one Test at home for the first time since 1995, there was hardly a moment when the team put a foot wrong. India Women's stuck to the promise of playing 'positive cricket', weathered all mini storms along the way and largely dictated terms against fancied opponents in Australia and England. In fact, there was no disparity in Team India's clinical performance in the two home Tests played on different surfaces here at the Wankhede Stadium



and at the DY Patil Stadium against England, considering they were playing at home for the first time in almost a decade. While India scripted the biggest

win for any team by margin of runs against England, their first-ever triumph over Australia in 11 Tests now has ensured more entries in the column of 'match-

es won' compared to 'matches lost'. In 40 Tests, India now have seven wins and six defeats, while 27 have been drawn.

India's dominating show warrants the attention of the game's custodians to ruminate over more 'home' Tests in future since such games have only

been few and far between. If the win over England last week saw the emergence of new Test stars in Jemimah Rodrigues, Shubha Satheesh and Renuka Singh Thakur, the one against Australia witnessed the 20-year-old Richa Ghosh arriving at the scene with 52 on debut. On the fourth day morning, Indian spinners ruled the roost as the trio of Sneha Rana (5-2-9-2), Rajeshwari Gayakwad (1-4-1-0-2) and Deepti Sharma (3-2-5-0) teamed up to wreck havoc on the Australian resistance. Australia, looking to build on their slender lead of 46 runs, collapsed spectacularly to lose five wickets in the first 45 minutes of the day and concede the game to India. Pooja Vastrakar began the damage by trapping Ashleigh

Gardner for seven in front of the wickets, and Rana tiled the game in India's favour when she struck twice to remove Annabel Sutherland (27) and Alana King (0). Rajeshwari Gayakwad, who was unlucky to have not got any success on the third day when she got a breakthrough nearly thrice, cleaned up Kim Garth (4) for her first wicket in the innings. Gayakwad then bamboozled Jess Jonassen (9) with a delivery that turned into the left-hander sharply and crashed into middle and leg, with the last recognised Australian batter nearly toppling over on her front foot. Australia were bundled out for 261 in their second innings, having scored a moderate 219 in their first essay after electing to bat.

Curran loses appeal to have BBL umpire intimidation ban overturned

AP ■ SYDNEY

English all-rounder Tom Curran's appeal to have his four-match ban overturned for intimidating an umpire during a recent Big Bash League match has been dismissed. Cricket Australia had charged Curran on Thursday with a level-three offence under clause 2.17 in the code of conduct following an incident that occurred during the Sydney Sixers' team warm-up before its match against the Hobart Hurricanes on December 11. Video footage of the incident showed Curran apparently refusing to comply with the umpire's direction to stay off the wicket

while warming up. Curran - who has been capped for England in all three formats and is in his fourth season with the Sydney Sixers - then went to the other end to complete another practice run-up and almost collided with the umpire, who had stood on the bowling crease to prevent Curran from again encroaching onto the pitch. A verbal altercation between Curran and the umpire immediately followed. Cricket Australia confirmed in a statement on Sunday that the Sixers' appeal against the English international all-rounder's four-match ban was dismissed with the original sanction to stand.

Kaur spell on third day was turning point: Sneha

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's spell on the third evening was the turning point in the one-off women's Test between India and Australia which the hosts won by eight wickets, said all-rounder Sneha Rana here on Sunday. Kaur brought herself on after Australia's resurgent batting display kept India on the field for a large part of the third day and dismissed Tahlia McGrath (73) and Alyssa Healy (32), after they had reduced the first-innings deficit of 187 runs and taken a slender lead of 46 runs. India came out firing on all cylinders to bowl Australia out for 261 after they resumed play at 233/5 on the fourth day and easily chased the target of 75 runs. "We were not thinking much



and wanted to stay in the present. Harmanpreet's two wickets were the turning point," Rana told the media after India's maiden win over Australia in Tests when asked about the turning point in the match. Rana seconded India captain Kaur in acknowledging that head coach Amol Muzumdar had a key role to play in their strong performances.

"As Harmanpreet said, he had an important role in the team. He has been a very experienced player and all his inputs have been good," Rana said. "We have tried to follow that and the result can be seen in the last two Tests. We are very thankful that he has come on as a coach. In the future too we hope to continue doing well under him," she added. On the fourth and final day spinners Rana, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Deepti Sharma tamed the Australian batters with a superlative bowling show that saw the visitors lose five wickets for 28 runs. Rana said the fact that they all compliment each other with on-field discussions worked in their favour. "We try to talk a lot among ourselves when we are in (the field) and remain calm," she said.

"Each of us back our respective strengths and we discuss about what is working in terms of which kind of delivery is behaving how and what you have to bowl to a batter." "We try to keep it simple and not overcomplicate it and whatever we speak about on the field compliments us. We have had partnerships in both batting and bowling and the result is in front of us," Rana added. Rana said given the lack of Test assignments for the Indian team it was imperative to keep things simple. "The preparations were simple, we had no need of experimenting a lot because red-ball cricket is a long game. We kept it simple, we were calm and I have always prepared to bowl in my channels. I back my strengths and in these two matches I tried to do the same," she said.



Healy rues not having more games

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Australia's first-ever loss to India in the one-off women's Test is not even a "blip" and next year's T20 World Cup in Bangladesh remains their ultimate goal, said captain Alyssa Healy on Sunday. Indian Women recorded a historic maiden victory over a venerable Australia in the one-off Test, putting a befitting end to their first 'home season' of Test cricket in 28 years. The eight-wicket win was India's first-ever triumph over Australia in 11 Tests. "Probably not even a blip," Healy told media after the match when asked where does this defeat leave her side given their dominant record. "It is a format where we are not overly familiar with conditions." Healy said Australia's squad has undergone a lot of change but they are comfortable with where they are currently placed. "Within our group, we are really comfortable with where we are at and sort of the progression that we are on and where we want to get to moving forward," she said. "Ultimately, there is a big T20 World Cup in Bangladesh towards the end of next year and that is a real carrot for us. These are the sort of big trophies that we are wanting to win. "Yes, every series in between now and then is important, but at the same time, we are building towards that World Cup and we want to make sure that we are playing our best cricket to win those big trophies."

more and it would create a real contest over three games," she said. "But the nature of the female game, at the moment, is (that) it is (a) very white-ball dominant and trying to fit red-ball in the calendar and (to) fit all the white-ball games in particular seems to be taking precedence. "You take three one-day games out and we could probably play two more Test matches," she added. Before India took on England and Australia in one-off Test each, England's Tammy Beaumont had hoped that the home team's strong showing would add more matches to the future schedule. Healy said the ball is in the court of the respective national boards. "That is up to the BCCI and probably Cricket Australia as well to decide whether that is on the cards or not," she said. "In the press conference (post match presentation) when Anjum (Chopra) asked me a question, then I thought, 'Yep, imagine playing two more of these. That would be an unbelievable experience for our group and probably a true test of both sides' abilities." "India's relentlessness with the ball stood out" On the final day, India thwarted a spirited Australian resurgence, first sparking a collapse in the visitors' ranks to snaffle the remaining five wickets for 28 and then knocking off a meagre target of 75 without much ado. Healy credited India's 'relentlessness' with the ball in their one-off Test. "One-off Test match, India playing in their home conditions, you'd expect them to be heavy favourites. But the way we tried to adapt and and continue to learn throughout the four days was really impressive," Healy said. "Their relentlessness with the ball was probably what stood out to me. They are obviously heavy favourites in their own conditions."

Virat, Rohit sweat it out as life moves on

PTI ■ CENTURION

It has now been more than a month since the forgettable World Cup final but it still hurts like hell. However, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are two battle-hardened professionals who know that it's important to move on as they sweated it out in companionable silence. There's a 31-year jinx in Indian cricket having missed out on a Test series win in the 'Rainbow Nation' and in the twilight zone of their careers, both would want to achieve which no other

Indian teams could. While Kohli, who came back from London after a short break with family, joined the training after half an hour, Rohit did look a bit more relaxed after shutting himself off for three weeks. The two batted in different nets and centre practice strip, and also faced throwdowns for more than an hour. There was hardly any conversation between them even when they took short breaks in between. Unlike the World Cup nets when there was a mix of both focus and laughter, the only sound that made you sit up and



take notice was that of the red leather colliding with the willow. Coach Rahul Dravid had a hawk eye on centre nets as KL Rahul put his pads on quickly. With Kona Bharat not even

bothering to don the big gloves during the first hour, one had no doubt who would keep wickets. It became more clear with the slip formation when Rahul kept wickets and had young turks Yashvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill for company. Cricket is piece of life and all present at Supersport Park during the gruelling three hours were seen picking up the pieces. Amid the silence though, Rohit's sense of humour remained intact when he joked with a well known YouTuber that "you have got competition because others are here," pointing out at other

journalists, who have come to cover the series. The first to enter the nets, Rohit and young Yashvi Jaiswal were seen taking turns while facing Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur for five deliveries each before coming in for next round. However, the signature Rohit came to fore when he slog swept Ashwin deep into the grass embankments. One knew that nothing has changed as per Rohit the opener is concerned. As the skipper was in the midst of his first stint, in walked Kohli and had a brief chat with coach Dravid as he watched Rohit's

batting. After some time, King Kohli walked out of the main arena and padded up for the throwdown nets where Rohit and Jaiswal would join in a few minutes. "Tujhko pehle jana ki main jaoon (You will go first or should I go)," Rohit asked his younger opening partner who wants the senior to take strike. One of the throwdown specialists Dayanand asked his skipper, "Dada aapke liye kaunsa bowler rakhein, right arm ya left-arm (Should I keep right-arm or left-arm bowler for you)."

Charan joins Indian Street Premier League as Hyderabad team owner

PTI ■ MUMBAI

RR' star Ram Charan on Sunday said he has joined the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) as the owner of team Hyderabad. The ISPL is India's first tennis ball T10 cricket tournament that will be played inside a stadium. The inaugural edition will feature 19 high-intensity matches, boasting a line-up of six teams - Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, and Srinagar. Ram Charan made the announcement about joining the ISPL on his official X page.

"Excited to announce my ownership of Team Hyderabad in the Indian Street Premier League! "Beyond cricket, this venture is about nurturing talent, fostering community spirit, and celebrating street cricket's essence. Join me as we elevate Hyderabad's presence in the ISPL, crafting memorable moments and igniting passion," the actor wrote in the post. Recently, Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar and Hrithik Roshan were announced as the team owners of Mumbai, Srinagar and Bengaluru, respectively. The ISPL is scheduled to be held from March 2 to March 9 in Mumbai.

Prioritising international cricket has helped my game: Starc

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior Australian seamer Mitchell Starc has admitted that he had in the past turned down multiple lucrative offers from the Indian Premier League (IPL) to prioritise his international career, which has "helped" him in improving his game. Starc has been roped in by two-time winners Kolkata Knight Riders for a record Rs 24.75 crore during the auction last week, and it would be his first stint in the

tournament since 2015. Starc said that the break during the IPL allowed him to recharge himself and stay fit for the international assignments. "Juggling one cricket schedule is hard enough, let alone when there's two in a relationship. So, I've always spent that time away from cricket with Alyssa or time with family and recharging my body for being as fit and as ready as I can for Australian cricket," he was quoted as saying by AAP. "I don't regret any of it. I think it's

certainly helped my Test cricket. The money is always nice and certainly was this year, but I've always prioritised international cricket, and I think that's helped my game." Starc's last outing in the IPL was with Royal Challengers Bangalore, the only he has represented in the competition till date. Signed by the side in 2014, he has featured in 27 matches so far, scalping 34 wickets at an economy of 7.17 and best figures of four for 15.

PCB mulls regulation to forbid agents from signing more than 2, 3 players

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board is looking to implement a regulation which forbids any player's agent or company from signing more than 2 to 3 players at one time for representation. The cricket management committee running the Board affairs is expected to take a final decision on this regulation in the next couple of days after two agencies signed on dozens of Pakistani team players and officials for representation. After realising that one agent, Talha Rehmani and his company Saya Corporation represented 7-8 leading Pakistani players and officials including Babar

Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Muhammad Rizwan, PCB has now learnt that another agency known as International Cricketers Association (ICA) also has contracts with many players and officials presently touring Australia. Concerned with the development, PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf has directed the legal department to frame new set of regulations for vetting agents/companies before they sign on players and officials and restricting the number of clients they can have at one time in Pakistan cricket. The ICA apparently has Sarfraz Ahmed, Imam ul Haq, Saim Ayub, Muhammad Harris, Naseem Shah, Abdullah



Shafique, Usama Mir, Aamer Jamal and Muhammad Hasnain on its clients list.

More importantly even the Pakistan team director, Muhammad Hafeez was work-

ing with ICA until recently. While Hafeez has resigned, it has now emerged that the

national team bowling coach Umar Gul, spin bowling coach Saeed Ajmal, batting consultant

Adam Hollioake and the team's strength and conditioning trainer and national selector Kamran Akmal are also on the ICA clientele. Zaka Ashraf from time to time in his interviews has raised concerns that one agent or company having so many players under its umbrella basically means it can yield a lot of influence and say in the team selection and affairs. In a recent leaked audio conversation, Ashraf could be heard saying that when the PCB offered Babar Azam only the Test captaincy after the ODI World Cup, he called up his agent Talha Rehman who advised him to leave the captaincy in all three formats.

"These agents basically have a lot of influence and power in the team through their clientele and we are trying to deal with that," he was heard saying in the leaked audio. The PCB had also accepted a resignation from Inzamam ul Haq as chief selector after it launched an inquiry into reports that the former captain was an owner in a sports marketing company with Rizwan and Rehmani as his partners. The inquiry was to confirm whether Inzamam's affiliation with the company was a conflict of interest as he was a paid employee of the board but the inquiry has fizzled out after the board said it had accepted Inzamam's resignation.

‘DEVIL HAS THE POTENTIAL TO RECEIVE NATIONAL-LEVEL AWARDS’

PNS| HYDERABAD

Nandamuri Kalyanram is known for his knack for selecting unique scripts right from the beginning of his career, and now he is bringing another interesting film titled *Devil: The British Secret Agent*. Samyuktha and Malavika Nair playing key roles in the film made us all anticipate more from the film.

The banger trailer promised a thrilling cinematic experience. As part of promotions, music director Harshavardhan Rameshwar interacted with the media about the film and said, “Regarding the movie, we anticipated that the music and background score would be well-received, but the level of appreciation has exceeded our expectations. The response has been overwhelming, and I am grateful for the praise.”

After *Arjun Reddy*, he is known as a background score specialist, although his true passion lies in creating music for songs. Now, he is receiving offers for both RRR and music. “In *Devil*, we incorporated various traditional foreign instruments, aiming for a natural feel in the score, considering the film’s 1940s setting. For example, *Animal* is a movie of the current generation, and transitioning from it to *Devil* posed an initial challenge to me. However, once immersed in the world of the *Devil*, I gave my best,” added the music director.

Kalyan Ram, according to the interviewee, delivered a peak performance in *Bimbisara*, and in *Devil*, audiences will witness his vishwaroop. At the same time, he’s glad that Abhishek Nama trusted him throughout. Despite his busy schedule with *Animal*, he patiently waited, showing confidence in his

With Nandamuri Kalyanram-starrer *Devil: The British Secret Agent* nearing its release, music director Harshavardhan Rameshwar interacts with the media here, sharing some tidbits about the music of the film, working on the music score, and more.

abilities. The music director continues, “This film, I believe, has the potential to receive national-level awards. Cinematographer Soundara Rajan breathed life into *Devil* with stunning visuals, and I think my score incorporated those visuals. No matter how much we do, if there are no stunning visuals, the effect will not be seen.”

Devil features three songs, and Kalyan Ram insisted on bringing something new to each. The music director had the freedom to collaborate with young and talented lyricists. Abhishek suggested rapper Raja Kumari, and the song has garnered a positive response too!

On the other hand, observing Sandeep Reddy Vanga’s writing for *Animal*, he expressed his desire to work with Sandeep, and interestingly, the latter has invited him to work on two more films. The music director aspires to direct a music-based movie, possibly telling the story of world-famous drummer Shivamani.



VIJAY THALAPATHY’S NEXT TO BE TITLED *G.O.A.T*

Speculation is running wild regarding the title of *Thalapathy 68*, the much-anticipated film featuring Vijay under the direction of Venkat Prabhu. Initial rumors suggested potential titles such as Boss or Puzzle, but the filmmakers promptly dismissed these speculations.

The latest buzz now hints at the title *G.O.A.T*, sending fans into a frenzy of excitement. Anticipation is building, and enthusiasts are eagerly counting down the days until December 31st, the official title announcement.

Thalapathy 68 boasts an ensemble cast, featuring Meenakshi Chaudhary, Prabhu

Deva, Prashant, Sneha, Laila, and Vaibhav. Originally slated to be directed by Atlee, the film saw a change in direction with Venkat Prabhu taking the helm.

Yuvan Shankar Raja is set to weave his musical magic, while Siddhartha Nuni captures the film’s visual essence as the cinematographer. Shooting kicked off in October, with the talented Raju Sundaram choreographing a captivating song. Vijay’s last on-screen appearance was in *Leo*.

As the excitement mounts for the official title reveal on December 31st, fans can’t help but speculate on the significance behind *G.O.A.T*. With such a stellar cast and crew, *Thalapathy 68* is poised to make a lasting impact on the cinematic landscape. Stay tuned for the unveiling of the title that will undoubtedly add another layer of intrigue to this much-awaited cinematic spectacle.



Nayanthara’s *Annapoorani* to make its OTT premiere on Dec 29

Lady Superstar Nayanthara’s milestone 75th movie, *Annapoorani*, originally released in Tamil on December 1, 2023, is making headlines once again. Directed by debutant Nileshe Krishnaa, the film garnered mixed reviews from both critics and audiences.

The latest update reveals that the movie is set for its OTT debut on

Netflix. Officially announced,

Annapoorani will premiere on the platform on December 29, 2023. What adds to the surprise is that the Tamil film will also feature Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Hindi dubbed versions.

Produced by Jatin Sethi and R Ravindran under Zee Studios, Naad Studios, and Trident Arts, *Annapoorani* boasts an extraordinary cast, including Jai, Sathyaraj, KS Ravi Kumar, Redin Kingsley, Achyuth Kumar, Kumari Sachu, Renuka, Karthik Kumar, and Suresh Chakkaravarthy. Thaman lends his musical brilliance to enhance this cinematic journey. Stay tuned for more OTT updates.

‘Rashmika Mandanna was not the first choice for *Animal*,’ reveals Sandeep Reddy Vanga

Sandeep Reddy Vanga’s *Animal*, marks the first collaboration between Ranbir Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna. However, an interesting revelation came to light as the director shared that Parineeti Chopra was initially his first choice for the movie. The disclosure emerged during a candid conversation with Komal Nahta, where Sandeep candidly admitted his mistake and recounted the incident.

Expressing remorse, Sandeep acknowledged, “Actually, it was my mistake. I was like please forgive me, if possible!” He went on to explain that he had signed Parineeti Chopra for the role a year and a half before the commencement of the shoot. However, he candidly admitted that, for some reason, he failed to envision the character of Geetanjali in her. Sandeep philosophically remarked, “Some characters don’t go well with some actors.”

Opening up about his casting decisions, Sandeep emphasized that he does not believe in auditions and relies solely on his instincts. Despite always admiring Parineeti’s acting and harboring a desire to cast her as Preeti in *Kabir Singh*, circumstances did not align at that time. He expressed that working with Parineeti had always been a long-standing aspiration.

In a forthright conversation with Parineeti, Sandeep conveyed his decision to cast another artist, emphasizing, “Sorry, nothing is bigger than the film. So I’m taking this decision and going ahead with another artist.” Although Parineeti felt disheartened initially, she understood the rationale behind Sandeep’s choice. The director’s transparency and respect for the filmmaking process underscore the complexities of casting decisions and the delicate balance between artistic vision and practical considerations.



Vaishnavi Chaitanya’s next film titled *LOVE ME*

Vaishnavi Chaitanya next gets an interesting title. Film enthusiasts hold a special place in their hearts for Vaishnavi Chaitanya, whose debut film *Baby* left an indelible mark, creating waves of admiration. Anticipation is palpable as fans eagerly await her upcoming cinematic venture.

Excitement builds as reports circulate about Vaishnavi’s collaboration with Ashish Reddy, the talented nephew of renowned producer Dil Raju, in their much-anticipated project. Adding to the intrigue, this film marks the directorial debut of the promising Arun Bhimavarapu.

In an interesting turn of events, Dil Raju, with his discerning eye for talent, has chosen Vaishnavi Chaitanya as the leading lady for this venture. The buzz around the film, tentatively titled *Love Me*, has already started to spread.

According to sources, an official announcement is imminent within the next couple of days, heightening the anticipation surrounding this exciting new cinematic endeavor. Stay tuned as the curtain lifts on what promises to be a captivating chapter in Vaishnavi Chaitanya’s burgeoning film career.

RAM CHARAN JOINS ISPL AS HYDERABAD TEAM OWNER

The Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) stage was set. T10 Tennis Ball Cricket Tournament is about to start. The players who have been playing tennis balls these days are now going to step onto the field. In this sequence, global star Ram Charan created a sensation. He won the Hyderabad team in the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL). Along with Charan, stars like Akshay Kumar (Srinagar), Hrithik Roshan (Bengaluru), Amitabh Bachchan (Mumbai) participated in the Indian Street Premier League. It is a privilege to own multiple teams to nurture the young and new talent that has been unable to come to light these years.

The first edition of the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) will be held in Mumbai city from March 2 to March 9. In this, 19 matches will be organized to generate excitement and enthusiasm between six teams: Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir). There are no age restrictions except inclusion of at least one player in the team consisting of fifteen players from the Under 19 age group category. ISPL will become a new platform to hone the talent of the country.

On taking part in the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL), Ram Charan said,

“It is very thrilling to be a part of the ISPL. This will break new ground in entertainment in cricket. Hyderabad’s extraordinary cricket talent continues to be front and centre. This cricket league will be a great platform for regional players to prove their talent at the national level. Owning the Hyderabad team gives me unknown happiness. This is a great plat-

form to showcase our city’s interest in the game of cricket.”

Indian Street Premier League is getting ready for the inaugural edition. Aspiring players who want to participate in the league should register on the IPL official website and get the Golden Tickle opportunity to participate in the City Trails program.

